

Them and Us;
an examination of working-class culture,
politics and attitudes in selected
British twentieth century novels

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Declaration: This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted in any form for the award of a higher degree at any other educational establishment.

Dedication: For my amazing Mum & also Mum2 (Mig), and of course; for 'us'

Abstract:

'If only 'them' and 'us' had the same ideas we'd get on like a house on fire, but they don't see eye to eye with us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that's how it stands and how it will always stand.'¹

The thesis seeks to investigate and identify specific instances of *them* and *us* in selected British twentieth century working-class novels. The methodology employed is *qualitative* with a *heuristic/psychological* underpinning that relies in part on the theories of Clark Moustakas and which then supports a *Marxist, feminist* aspect centring on *reader-response theories*. The aims include identifying, defining and deconstructing the nature of the working-class novel having first identified the term 'working-class' and the reasons for the selection and identification of the novels chosen which may be termed 'working-class'; it explores the difference between novels perceived to be 'working-class literature' as opposed to 'proletarian-writing' and examines specific areas which arise including culture, the System, religion, the nature of authority and attitudes to women and minority groups in conjunction with an examination and identification of what may be termed pervasive ingrained machismo dogmas which may in turn lead to a better understanding of the terms *them* and *us*.

The central focus of this thesis is on the texts, the novels themselves, what the author(s) or the narrators are actually saying more than what the critics have to say. Although the nature of 'class' has been investigated many times the specific identification of the phrase 'them and us', though in common use, has seldom previously been subject to scrutiny with regard to an investigation of specific literary texts and it is my belief that the term has become accepted as though there was but one definition of the term. Further, the term has come to encompass and to be applied in general to novels in a manner which has then categorised these novels while failing to examine the actual texts in depth; this is something I will examine particularly in section three.

The thesis is divided into ten chapters with further sub-division to three sections. The first section seeks to identify *them* and *us* in general terms, by investigating instances of *them* and *us* in selected novels of the twentieth century. In section two the focus is upon novels which may be inclined to favour *them* while the third section conversely examines novels which might lean more towards *us*.

Key words: *working-class, socialist, feminist, proletarian, Marx, System.*

¹ Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), p.7-8

Chapter one

Introduction and methodology

The methodology, my guideline for arriving at a satisfactory conclusion, will be qualitative. What seems to be the way to progress is to rely on what the literary texts actually say, what the narrative reveals, and what the author's opinions, if they recognisably intervene, lend to both the historical significance and to what Assman refers to as the 'cultural memory'² within the dialogue. Seeking to establish how this approach relates to these selected twentieth century novels especially with regard to the issue of *them* and *us*. It is my contention that the critical commentary relating to the culture of a *them* and *us* perspective is lacking and with that in mind I should make it clear from the outset that close reading of the author's texts is my priority; the content of the novels taking precedence over literary theories. My aim is to identify and to clarify exactly what the term '*them* and *us*' refers to, for I suspect that although in most instances *them* are the people who control the economy and *us* are what students of Proudhon would have referred to as the 'wage slaves',³ there are surely diverse voices hinting at other interpretations and even voices which disguise their intent.

I intend also to incorporate to some extent the ideas of Clark Moustakas⁴ and his research method described as the heuristic process in a book of his which framed part of my awareness *prior* to the research question being formulated clearly in my own mind. A phrase of Roads referred to by Moustakas haunts, intrigues and inspires me; 'let go of the known and swim in an unknown current'⁵ meaning, to abandon preconceived notions and rely on the experience stimulated by the internal flow of raw and personal 'knowledge'. I will seek for this raw and personal knowledge within the texts via a reader-response approach which will accommodate my own experience as an individual born into the working class and employed

² Jan Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: University Press, 2006), p.63

³ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Edinburgh, Oakland: AK Press, 2005), p.77

⁴ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications* (London: Sage, 1990)

⁵ *ibid*; p.26

in manual tasks and the politics of Trades Unions for a substantial part of my life.

Nearly all uses of a heuristic approach are confined to the areas of psychology and psychotherapy; however as the basis of my approach is to seek enlightenment by immersing myself in literary texts that have a particular meaning to this researcher I eventually concluded that I would be comfortable with a research methodology which would be appropriate to there being one single individual whose experience I could rely upon totally and whose personal experiences were in many respects similar to that of many of the characters outlined in various working-class novels. This individual is my 'self'. To conform to my ethical code I should declare also that there is a protective element embedded within the heuristic approach which recognises the possible dangers of swimming in the unknown current. This is particularly true for me as I have been diagnosed as bipolar and although it has been controlled for over thirty years part of its effect upon me still is to heighten my emotional responses. Further, my decision to incorporate an element of the heuristic approach was taken with Moustakas' point uppermost; that there are possible dangers inherent in immersing oneself in the past and in exploring the deeper relevance of narratives when they have close personal relevance; 'The dawning of awareness may be refreshing and peaceful, or it may be disturbing and even jarring.'⁶

While the theories of Moustakas form part of the foundations upon which my methodological approach sits they are incorporated in part as a means of ethical self-protection and as such will be there in the role of support rather than the substance of the core approach. That said as a practising psychologist working in the field of psychotherapy I will also centre mainly on the actual texts as opposed to critical commentary. To explain; I find myself inclined toward Carl Rogers' person-centred notion of psychotherapy that the 'client' is the most important source of truth, in this case the client being the authors of the original texts; Tressell, Gibbon, Hines, Holdsworth etc. It is right of course to listen carefully to the commentary which in

⁶ *ibid*; p.13

psychology stems from relatives, friends, 'experts' and of course in literature from the critics and theorists; but it is essential to hold fast to the notion that the essence of truth lies with the client/author.

There is also a link with explorative psychology and reader-response theories which I also intend to incorporate, for example Selden suggests that the Gestalt approach to psychology observes that

the human mind does not perceive things in the world as unrelated bits and pieces but as *configurations* of elements, themes, or meaningful, organized wholes. Individual items look different in different contexts, and even within a single field of vision they will be interpreted according to whether they are seen as 'figure' or 'ground'. These approaches and others have insisted that the perceiver is active and not passive in the act of perception.⁷

The deduction is that all readers actively partake in an act of interpretation when experiencing texts and that just as individual objects look different in different contexts so will texts be observed and 'translated' in various ways as the reader progresses through experiences; further, that text itself is not an immutable object to be observed as-is but is instead symbolic of something intended. A reader may, or may not, interpret text as the author envisioned. A reader's interpretation will change as they progress through experiences.

Furthermore Iser discusses the process of interaction between the author and the reader and maintains that the text only takes on meaning when it is realised (*konkretisiert*) and that the act of realisation is to some extent dependent on the individual disposition of the reader

⁷ Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson & Peter Brooker, 'Reader-Orientated Theories' in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* Fifth Edition (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2005), p.45

and thus 'the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence.'⁸ And he further maintains that 'this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual'.⁹ He concludes that there is a process of engagement with a text where imagination should be stimulated.

I would concur with this, insofar as it goes, but would further maintain that this act of engagement is exclusive to any given reader and applies equally to non-creative texts. To state it very simply; the reading of any given text is influenced by who the reader is and the historical time in which the text is read. The reader's cultural upbringing, the influences of the movement of history and even the reader's current state of mind will influence their perceptions. Further; no statement, whether it be a fictional or allegedly factual statement, is influenced by the writer's experiences and background in the same way that the reader is influenced. Some knowledge of the author's background, if available, might assist the reader to perceive what the author is actually conveying; an empathic response might for example arise if the reader and the author come from a similar 'place' (place in the broad sense of culture, class etc.). Thus I would maintain that no two given individuals ever read a text and 'see' it in the same way and further that no given individual ever reads a text and absorbs it fully. At a different period in his or her life, in a different frame of mind, the actual meaning of the text changes at least insofar as it is perceived by the reader. I would maintain further that in order to comprehend what a critic or a commentator on any given text is actually saying then any third party reader (that is; a reader who is reading an explanation or interpretation of a given text) needs to have some knowledge of the commentator/interpreter's background and culture; if this is not available then any third party would be prone to a failure to understand exactly what is being communicated. This is because the same interpretive perceptions are at work when reading commentary on a fictional or factual text as are

⁸ Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach' in J. Tompkins (Ed.), *Reader Response Criticism – from Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.50

⁹ *ibid*; p51

present when the initial text is being interpreted by the reader.

If the above is accepted then, in writing a commentary on fictional texts, this particular author is involved in the texts and interprets the texts in a different way to anyone else including those individuals who are concerned with reading this commentator's commentary. To attempt to elucidate a complex problem: it is accepted that the argument can become *reductio ad absurdum* leading to a situation akin to a literary solipsism if everyone accepts that everyone else interprets what other people have written so personally and privately that no dialogue or discourse relating to other individual's written texts is possible. However, although the problem seems immense there is a possible way forward once it is accepted that there is a problem and we become willing to think the unthinkable and to say the unsayable; namely that there is indeed a problem. Having done this, having identified the perceived problem, I maintain that one way to progress is to disclose the reasons why individuals read and interpret a text in a particular way; why any given reader sees a text in the way that they do. To do this I would maintain that it is important to know something of the background, the culture, the history of any given reader in order to enter into dialogue and discussion which is meaningful. This would take Iser's belief that the interpretation of text is dependent on the individual disposition of the reader into account and progress some way towards a solution.

Referring to the complexity of the act of reading Iser relates:

[...] the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the texts, we should not be able to use our imagination.¹⁰

Again I would concur; inasfar as this statement goes it is patently correct. Yet surely there is a need to follow the direction indicated here and to step a little further down the path to

¹⁰ *ibid*; p.58

examine the nature of 'imagination'. Reader 'A's imagination for example may lead them in a different direction or 'interpretation' of a given text to that taken by reader 'B', and if discourse is to be entered into between 'A' and 'B' with regard to that which is being 'said' by an author, then these gaps in the text which are filled-in by the reader's imagination have to be identified and related otherwise a mutual understanding of the text will not emerge. What will be likely to happen is that a dialogue with 'gaps in the texts' will occur which reader 'A' and reader 'B' will fill in using their imagination. When reading works of fiction such 'gaps' are not only acceptable, they are to be desired: however the same 'gaps' will occur in the critical exchange and comprehension of dialogue unless the position of both parties is clear. A critical review of a novel for example should ideally begin by the critic stating their way-of-seeing and/or any factual information which may cloud their perceptions in a manner which could lead to partiality. Thus if any given commentator were to criticise the dialogue between characters in (for example) *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* as being 'unlikely' or even 'false' then perhaps it would assist the comprehension of someone reading that commentary to know (for example) that the commentator spent a great deal of their life working with people like the characters in the novel in exactly the same situations. That is not to say however that the author has it 'wrong' and that the commentator has it 'right' (or *vice-versa*), it is to acknowledge that the revealing of perspectives, some might say 'prejudices', allows a reader room to comprehend more clearly what the commentator is saying, and thus to hopefully reach a better understanding of the novel.

Observations by such distinguished commentators as T. S. Eliot introduce an element of *them* and *us* into critical texts by asserting for example that the 'ordinary man's experience' is 'chaotic, irregular, fragmentary'; and further maintain that opposed to this is what he calls the 'poet's mind' which he believes is 'constantly amalgamating new wholes'.¹¹ Such a comment is, I would maintain, an assertion made by an academic who has vast knowledge

¹¹ T. S. Eliot quoted in Frank Kermode (Ed.), *The Metaphysical Poets, selected prose of T S Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p.64

of poetry and literature but has not, I suspect, vast knowledge of what he refers rather loosely to as the 'ordinary man', although it is accepted that his phraseology is not consciously class-based and his 'ordinary man' is simply the people he comes into non-personal contact on a daily basis and may even incorporate a broader concept such as 'everyman'.

The methodology therefore will be qualitative and will centre upon in-depth textual analysis involving reader-response theory incorporating what Jauss refers to as a 'transsubjective horizon of understanding'. Jauss believes that it is possible to avoid the subjective nature of conventional approaches which focus on the responses of the individual reader by expounding this horizon of understanding which determines how a text is understood, and further; that literature only becomes a meaningful experience for the reader when it is compared to other literary and experiential occurrences.¹² Jauss also argues that the reader uses different criteria at different periods to judge the nature of literariness in text or genre to which it belongs; he refers to it as 'Horizon and Expectation'.¹³ My own observations draw me to the conclusion that individual readers and their personal experiences create the horizon of understanding from the perspective of the reader and treat literature as 'a dialectical process of production and reception'.¹⁴ Jauss further states that

a literary work [...] awakens memories of that which was already read, bringing the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the 'middle and end,' which can be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre of type of text.¹⁵

¹² Hans-Robert Jauss, (Trans. Timothy Bahti) 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982), pp.3-45

¹³ *ibid*; p.56

¹⁴ *ibid*; p.57

¹⁵ Hans-Robert Jauss, 'The Reception Theory in Dialogue with History' in *Literary Endeavour-An International Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism* Volume v (January 2014), p.60

Holub makes an interesting observation which is applicable here, that Jauss represented 'the macrocosm of reception' (as opposed to Iser who was more concerned with 'the microcosm of response').¹⁶ I would suggest that the literary text examined in its entirety raises expectations that relate, specifically, to a reader's own personal experience(s) and that these experience(s) shape and form the reaction to these texts:

There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are only the potential millions of individual readers or the potential millions of individual literary works. A novel or a poem or a play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols.¹⁷

The heuristic element of my thesis is very similar in essence to reader-response theories and takes into account the personal experiences and memories referred to by Jauss, but it also links these personal and uniquely individual responses to how individuals react to text emotionally as well as intellectually, which is necessary as this exploration concerns both aspects. Moustakas however is specifically a psychologist who has expanded and redefined theories originating from Tversky and Kahneman and the use of a heuristic approach in research has previously been exclusive to the realms of psychology and psychotherapy where experience-based techniques are incorporated into problem solving, learning, and discovery.¹⁸ Being initially apprehensive that it may not prove a suitable vehicle for this kind of literary research I decided that it would perhaps be better employed alongside reader-response theory. Nonetheless a heuristic approach does focus on the importance of the 'experience' of the researcher and thus I concluded it was a pertinent, if unusual, approach. Moustakas points in the direction of experience-led investigation with the intention of defining and uncovering new meanings connected to phenomena which other research methods may

¹⁶ R. C. Holub, *Reception Theory* (London Methuen 1984), p83

¹⁷ Louise Rosenblatt; *Literature as Exploration* 5th edition (New York: Modern Language Association 1995), p.24

¹⁸ Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky and Paul Slovic (Eds.), *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics & Biases* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982)

fail to credit with due importance while Rennie describes the 'experiential' method as one that involves the

conceptualization of meanings of experiences whether reported by participants or inferred through participant observation. The conceptualizations take the form of either structures, narratives, themes, categories, or combinations of these forms.¹⁹

Examples include the descriptive phenomenological psychological method, narrative analysis, the grounded theory method, and heuristic research. I see a connection here with Jauss (as outlined above) and can see no reason why the subtle differences and similarities between the theories should not prove compatible.

My methodology will also seek, in part, to emphasise the importance of the numerous and complex voices in the novels under study. Novels present a multiplicity of distinct, often conflicting voices originating from a single place, object, group or idea and by identifying them the novel's geographic, psychological and stylistic range can be more closely examined, while simultaneously focusing on 'attitudes' and/or 'opinions' which must ultimately, I shall argue, be those of the author. These diverse voices include those of the individual characters, author interventions or comments, the voice of the appointed narrator(s) and perhaps most importantly the 'hidden' voice throughout all literature which is the unconscious voice of the writer. It is largely impossible to escape the subjective experience which compels individuals to express a viewpoint although writers (especially researchers) will go to great lengths to ensure their 'impartiality'. However, there are novelists like Robert Tressell who quite willingly reveal that they have a 'message' and thus in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*²⁰ Tressell, or at least the author as commentator, will openly intervene with a speech indicating his own political beliefs or he may even

¹⁹ David L. Rennie, 'Qualitative research as methodical hermeneutics' in *Psychological methods* 17(3), (2012) pp.385-398 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0029250385> (accessed July 11th 2016)

²⁰ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989)

intervene to lecture or to question the reader; indeed, as we shall see, he does this frequently.

The personal experience of having worked for the greater part of my life at manual-work will shape my approach to all that I write and will also make me a conversant, though partial, 'witness' as to what is being written in the name of working-class characters portrayed in the British novels under examination. Even though the characters are from a different time, my experience informs that little has changed; each and every character in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* for example formed a part of my personal experience on building sites from 1959 onwards and indeed I 'became' many of these characters as my life progressed. That which makes any given individual what they are is in part shaped by the strong opinions, beliefs and prejudices which they hold and which they are largely unaware of, as they stem in the main from what Rogers called 'conditions of worth'²¹ imposed from early childhood and which shape everyone's unique and individual way of seeing. Berger would further insist that we have a peculiar experience when reading novels, peculiar in the sense of a unique perspective:

When we read a story, we inhabit it. The covers of the book are like a roof and four walls. What is to happen next will take place within the four walls of the story. And this is possible because the story's voice makes everything its own.²²

What I am also proposing is the placing of special emphasis upon the need for methodological creativity and inventiveness while continuing to draw on the standard methods outlined but also including narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic and close-textual-analysis of qualitative research, in short to abide by the rules but to add something different:

²¹ Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (London: Constable, 1961)

²² John Berger, 'Keeping a Rendezvous. Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye' in *Expressen*; November 3rd, (1990) p.31

[...] our aim is to create conditions that facilitate methodological inventiveness, we need to ensure as far as possible that our pedagogical approaches match the message that we seek to communicate. More important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage [...] to create enquiry approaches that enable new and valid understandings to develop.²³

and also to keep in mind that

[...] research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project.²⁴

By 'reflexive' Hammersley and Atkinson mean a relationship which is bidirectional, one in which both the cause and the effect are cognisant of one another in a situation that does not necessitate that both functions are one or the other at a given time. In other words the thesis should at all times be open to seeking new directions.

I shall begin by examining what has been revealed to me by close-reading of, and by immersing myself in, several selected twentieth century novels and to examine in each the conflicts which arise in terms of culture, aspirations and political outlook. By the latter I do not necessarily mean the formal divisions recognised in political parties but the more general observations on life that could more commonly be termed 'political with a small p'.

The critical commentary available is extensive with regard to authors such as Robert Tressell, Barry Hines and Grassie Gibbon but is less so with regard to, for example, James Plunkett, Patrick Macgill and Lewis Jones and I can find very little critical comment which

²³ M. Dadds and S. Hart, *Doing Practitioner Research Differently* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.161

²⁴ M. Hammersley & P. Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in practice* 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1995), p.24

deals with or addresses the specific conflicts and attitudes which will form the basis of this thesis; the precise issue of *them* and *us*.

Some areas of omission are surprising in the extreme. George Orwell for example in the four volume Penguin edition of his collected essays and letters – well over three quarters of a million words written between 1920 and 1950 – never once mentions Grassic Gibbon, (publishing his *Scots Quair* trilogy from 1932 to 1934) Lewis Jones (publishing *Cwmardy* and *We Live* in 1937 to 1939 respectively) and he only mentions Robert Tressell (published in 1914) in passing, noting of *The Ragged Trousered Philantropists* that it is a ‘wonderful book’ but ‘clumsily written’.²⁵ I find similar gaps or omissions concerning many of the novels I choose to discuss herein.

Terry Eagleton, in a delightfully irreverent essay ‘The Revolt of the Reader’,²⁶ speaks of the Readers’ Liberation Movement whose declared intent is to be part of a new ‘socialist criticism’ willing and ready to ‘take over the means of production’. Insofar as my thesis involves critical reading of novels and commentaries, then I have to declare openly that I am a committed supporter of the RLM and I feel free to engage with the content of any given novel as it appears to me. My own relevance, already discussed, is indisputable because I interpret the text through my eyes, view incidents and character from my own peculiar perspective, recognise truths, half-truths, bias and even lies through a haze of conditions-of-worth, value judgements, unique experiences and ground-in prejudices which are mine and mine alone and while this is true of most academic commentary it is seldom acknowledged.

Critical commentary which deals *specifically* with my topic is almost non-existent. This is

²⁵ George Orwell, ‘The Proletarian Writer’ in *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Volume ‘2’ My Country Right or Left* (London: Penguin, 1971), p.56

²⁶ Terry Eagleton, ‘The Revolt of the Reader’ in *Against the Grain: Essays, 1975-1985*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p.185

particularly true with regard to James Plunkett the author of *Strumpet City*.²⁷ Perhaps this is because, as Eagleton observes, most cultural theorists 'like to feign that value is unimportant'.²⁸ By 'value' of course he means that value which individuals make when passing judgements; the value that determines a prejudice which may well assert that Grassic Gibbon for example is a 'better' writer than Lewis Jones or that James Plunkett's novels have little value because they are mainly available to be read by 'ordinary' people at most airport bookshops; they are, to use a phrase which is tinged with class-bias, 'popular reading'.

I begin from the perspective which views all culture as having value, however, I maintain there are differences; it is fruitless to simply view 'culture' as an all-encompassing phenomenon. Culture is something which is usually adherent to 'class'²⁹ and each of us adapt our particular appreciation of a given cultural-value as we progress in society; 'culture is a crucial marker of social differences'.³⁰ In times when alleged social-mobility is recurrent most people find it necessary, comfortable and even pleasurable to adapt their cultural outlook as life evolves.

It is also true that an individual adapts his/her surroundings, be they political, concrete or abstract; which is to accept that the culture individuals inhabit or adhere to at any given time frames their/our humanity and to some extent defines who we are at that time. Nonetheless it is important also to accept that the

[...] culture you inhabit is not definitive to your humanity, in the sense that beings of different cultures are not creatures of different species. To be *some* kind of cultural

²⁷ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982)

²⁸ Terry Eagleton, *the illusions of postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.94

²⁹ 'Social class as culture', *Association for Psychological Science* August 9, 2011
<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/> (accessed June 23rd 2014)

³⁰ John Holden, *Culture and Class* (London: Counterpoint, 2010), p.iv

being is indeed essential to our humanity, but not to be any particular kind.³¹
(author's italics)

Each individual in society is unique and each individual is unique in terms of his or her cultural perspective.

Yet the differences which relate to 'class' are specific and are connected with the position from which incidents, customs and 'differences' are observed; in general terms the miner striking for what he believes to be a fair wage and better conditions will not have the same value-focus or cultural attitude as a shareholder in the same coal-mine (a point discussed in Ellen Wilkinson's *Clash*, Chapter five). To take issue with Eagleton: I agree that 'beings of different cultures are not creatures of different species',³² however, they do belong to different layers of society wherein the difference is such that the divide becomes almost so wide that communication becomes virtually impossible, resulting frequently in the mere recognition of there being a *them* and an *us*. Some of the novels which I shall be examining in this thesis do just that; they 'recognise' a difference but do not expand upon it and it may even be that such recognition is not a part of the author's intent.

A broadly Marxist approach will also guide my methodology although it is adopted with some reservations, as it can be seen as pedantic on the one hand and so loose on the other that at times it seems that every alleged Marxist literary theorist has their own particular view as to exactly what a Marxist approach is. However, a feminist awareness will also heavily influence my methodology as it seeks at some levels to identify 'a relationship between the written word and the reality from which the words arise'³³ which I interpret as being compatible with reader-response theories and also with the general Marxist approach which centres on the material aspect of all which is perceived.

³¹ Terry Eagleton, *the Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.101

³² *ibid*; p.101

³³ Julian Wolfreys, *Literary Theories: a Reader & Guide* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1999), p.49

I recognise and encompass also the contribution made by Shklovsky and his identification and discussion of 'defamiliarisation', his notion that

The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.³⁴

The concept of a defamiliarisation process is important in that it invites us to consider such techniques as alienation, a process whereby the observer is presented with an object, an idea, a situation or a concept which should be familiar but which the artist/writer, by the use of devices, presentation or production, makes foreign to him or to her. (The manipulation of 'languages' for example in *A Scots Quair*, *How late it was, how late* and *The Lonely Londoners*) Part of that which interests me is that too often the 'great tradition' has dismissed working-class texts because they do not adhere to the standards which conform to that which was long believed to be desirable literary text. Tressell for example presents to the reader a *political-concept* in a manner which leaves no doubt that the novel, the story, the characters presented, are secondary to the message and this, for readers who seek a traditional presentation of a novel, is 'unfamiliar', is 'difficult' and is sometimes unfortunately denigrated because it is different.

Shklovsky suggests that the deliberate prolonging of our pleasure when confronting any work of art or presentation of the written word is desirable and that this lengthening of the pleasure-process justifies the artist or the author in deliberately making the form, concept and nature of that which is being viewed or interpreted by a reader more difficult to

³⁴ Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis in David Lodge, (Ed.) *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London: Longmans, 1988, 1965) p.18

comprehend. This is perhaps evident in Grassic Gibbon's trilogy *A Scots Quair*³⁵ wherein the author introduces a narrator who appears at times to be mocking the very role of commentator. One purpose of such a technique is of course to provide the reader with a 'space' in which to reconsider his or her initial perceptions and to allow for other possibilities; it is an idea which I find both stimulating and challenging. It is implicit in much of Shklovsky's writings that such defamiliarization lays the work of art, in my case the novel, open for re-appraisal which is partially what this thesis intends to do.

There is a need to make a distinction between writing as art (that which the novelist presents) and writing as criticism (that which the commentator, including myself as the author of this thesis, presents) so that the main body of this text, which relates to literature, is clearly understood by whoever is reading or interpreting the author's text. Reading earlier critics reminded me that they concentrated upon an interpretation of text, sometimes even an explanation of text and the categorising of literary works as presented in a singular manner by an author who, as it were, 'owns' the content. I. A. Richards, for example, opined

First must come the difficulty of making out the plain sense of poetry [...] readers of poetry frequently and repeatedly fail to understand it.³⁶

This statement implies that part of Richards' primary task, as critic, was to make clear what the author was/is saying, as if there was one definitive meaning to a text and that 'meaning' belonged exclusively to the author and/or to readers educated in interpreting given texts. Richards appears to suggest that the reader may read the text incorrectly and that it is part of the critic's duty to guide the reader to a 'correct' analysis of the text.

F. R. Leavis, in similar vein, commented on Dickens that he

³⁵ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006)

³⁶ K. R. Chatterjee, *Understanding I A Richards Principles of Literary Criticism* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002), p.207

[...] was a great genius and is permanently among the classics [...] but the genius was that of a great entertainer, and he had no responsibility as a creative artist.³⁷

This also leans towards the idea that a creative text is something which is a vehicle for passing on a 'specific' meaning and this needs 'explaining' to an otherwise ignorant reader. At the present time in the UK with the Comprehensive/Grammar schools debate reigniting and with a government espousing cultural-nationalistic values,³⁸ the notion that someone is needed to interpret 'things' is re-surfacing and Leavis' thinly veiled suggestion that the analysis of text is perhaps the exclusive domain of an elite group, section, or even 'class' of reader is worthy of re-examination. Leavis' statement makes clear his opinion that certain texts can be categorised and made separate from 'classic' writing, that if they do not possess some magical thread visible only to experts which links them to past acknowledged geniuses, they are somehow less worthy of consideration.

The approaches of both Richards and Leavis will be re-examined within my thesis especially with regard to the novels of Lewis Jones and Patrick Macgill whose style of presentation would perhaps not appeal to adherents of the 'great tradition' in literature. The tasks of these critics was, as they seen it, to make texts more generally accessible and therefore easier to comprehend when the text is first 'explained' by an informed and educated critic and/or to categorise it in terms of some sort of literary scale of greatness, which was what Shklovsky was reacting against and which is what I shall also question.

Whatever conclusion that is arrived at with regard to Shklovsky's approach it must also be accepted that there is no obligation on the author's part to deliberately make the text easily accessible to everyone. It may, or may not, be the case that it is desirable that an artist or author should deliberately seek to defamiliarize objects or text or to present something to the

³⁷ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York: George G Stewart, 1950), p.18

³⁸ Hansard, September 7th 2016 Volume 774

reader which is essentially propaganda. Or that the purpose of a given text, which Shklovsky refers to as 'an aesthetic end',³⁹ is indeed the result of the process of perception. However, it can be seen that the intent of early critics was, quite conversely, to attempt to remove the difficulty from a work of art, to explain, as it were, why it exists and to present a final and absolute definition as to its meaning. It is important to bear in mind that we are referring herein to art, with specific regard to the art of writing, and not to the art of criticism, if indeed criticism is an art. Perhaps it is heretical to suggest it but there appears to this reader little 'art' in criticism which directs the perceiver of any given work of art to one single and indisputable interpretation as to what the work of art actually means. Indeed I shall argue that by so doing valid alternative interpretations are lost or incorrectly categorised in terms of their 'worth'.

A further problem arises from the concept of a notion of defamiliarization which presumes a reality in life or in fictionalized texts that is objective and in some way 'fixed'. Surely in literature, indeed even in everyday speech, this is not the case. People speak for example of 'the sun rise' knowing all the while that sun rise is an illusion caused by the earth's rotation. Also many of these stars which observers refer to and attach attributes to no longer exist, indeed, have not existed for millions of years. Thus any alleged reality either in science, art or a literary text, I shall argue, is as transient as the science which speaks of 'sun rise' and which is subject to various perspectives that are influenced by history, sociological events and interpretations, an individual's circumstances and values and the education of the individual reader. Mostly though, it is an awareness of history and the various interpretations of history, the progress of time and our current theories which will guide how readers perceive ideas as text. Thus flux and diversity are perhaps the rubrics which govern how people perceive text; not the guidance of experts.

³⁹ Viktor Shklovsky 'Art as Technique' (Part one; Chapter three) in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Eds), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998) p16

I have selected for investigation eighteen novels which range over a wide field and have also deliberately included writers from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales plus novels which are either written by working-class women or which deal with specific problems arising in the lives of such women.

This may seem to be a wide selection but the breadth is necessary in order for the research to present a diverse palette and thus not be open to an accusation that too few, too similar or too narrow an investigation has been conducted with which to analyse the full scale of the concept.

The most obvious place perhaps to begin an investigation into the conflict implied in the term 'them and us' would perhaps be novels which focused upon gang culture and originally I devoted a complete chapter to the following novels: Kevin Sampson's *Awaydays*, Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners*, Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* and the remarkable account of Gorbals life as presented by McArthur and Kingsley Long in *No Mean City*. However, it transpired that the direct conflict in these novels occurred mainly *within* the classes and that while it was important to have researched this the knowledge acquired did not throw a great deal of light upon the central theme of the thesis, hence it has been deleted.

The thesis is divided into three sections; the first section will identify various instances of *them* and *us* which occur in selected twentieth century British novels centring on exposing the broad base available; sport and education, gender, the underclass and a chapter relating to two Labour Members of Parliament who wrote novels. Section two will centre upon two novels which I shall argue belong to the 'them' camp and Section three will focus on four novels which I shall argue constitute or represent 'us'. Firstly, however, a definition of the term 'twentieth century working-class novel' is necessary.

Chapter two

Working-Class novels

In my own city of Liverpool UK on the first day of the twentieth century the bells of the Church of Our Lady and Saint Nicholas would have pealed their welcome as they had done for the past eight centuries. That first of January was a Monday and the individuals being summoned by the Church bells would have mainly consisted of poverty-ravished men, women and children and one third of these people would die before their fifth birthday.⁴⁰ If they survived the perils of childhood and went on with their lives, the men could expect just forty six years of life while the women would die, on average, at forty eight.⁴¹ To 'celebrate' the new year these people would have dined on a breakfast of bread, margarine and tea and, it being the beginning of the week and if they had the good fortune to be employed, some would have shared a kipper.⁴² The average wage for a skilled man at the time was around twenty six shillings (£1.30p)⁴³ but the average income per head of population among the working-class would have been less than five shillings (25p) a week.⁴⁴

In Aberdeenshire James Leslie, who would later adopt the pen name Lewis Grassie Gibbon, was opening his eyes to the world⁴⁵ while in the small coastal town of Hastings in England a Dublin-born house-painter who designated himself as 'one of the damned' was penning a novel. That single-parent house-painter was Robert Noonan and the novel, which is now commonly referred to as 'The Socialist Bible'⁴⁶ or 'The Painter's Bible'⁴⁷ was *The Ragged*

⁴⁰ Carol Dyhouse, 'Working-Class Mothers and Infant Mortality in England, 1895-1914' in *Journal of Social History* Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter, 1978), pp.248-267 (p.250)

⁴¹ *ibid* p.251

⁴² *ibid* p.255

⁴³ E. A. Wrigley & R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (Cambridge: Press syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002), p.638

⁴⁴ B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty of Town Life* (London: MacMillan, 1902), p.9

⁴⁵ Paul Foot, Lewis Grassie Gibbon: 'Poet of the Granite City' in *Socialist Review*, No.258, (<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr258/foot.htm> accessed December 5th 2001), pp.24-5

⁴⁶ Howard Brenton, 'Rereading: Howard Brenton on The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists by Robert Tressell'; *The Guardian Newspaper* London UK, Saturday February 5th (2011)

Trousered Philanthropists,⁴⁸ a novel which was rejected by several publishers during the author's final years of life but which today has been translated into Russian, German, Dutch, Czech, Bulgarian, Japanese and many other languages.⁴⁹ Noonan himself was to die on the 3rd February 1909 in the Royal Liverpool Infirmary Workhouse; he had been admitted with tuberculosis which led to pneumonia and eventual heart failure, his hand-written novel sat in a biscuit tin under his hospital bed and the author's body was laid to rest in a paupers' grave alongside twelve others at Walton Cemetery.⁵⁰

That is the scenario then, as the twentieth century dawned, it may assist the reader when discussion turns to what we actually mean by the term 'Working-Class novels'. As may this:

Economically, no doubt, there are only two classes, the rich and the poor, but socially there is a whole hierarchy of classes, and the manners and traditions learned by each class in childhood are not only very different but--this is the essential point--generally persist from birth to death.⁵¹

That George Orwell wrote this in 1937 may cause some to feel that the comment is 'of its time' and is no longer relevant. However, while it is true that social-mobility increased as the twentieth century progressed,⁵² the notion of who-we-are despite our income and perceived status is something examined later in the novels of Barry Hines, Saunders Lewis and Sam Selvon specifically, and I hope to show that the notion of belonging to a class is indeed often constant despite the accumulation of wealth and/or status.

⁴⁷ Jeremy Hawthorn (Ed.), *The British Working-Class novel in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p.1

⁴⁸ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989)

⁴⁹ Dave Harker, *Tressell: The real story of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Zed Books; 2003), p.xvii

⁵⁰ F. C. Ball, *One of the Damned* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973), p.160

⁵¹ George Orwell, *Orwell's England: The Road to Wigan Pier in the Context of Essays, Reviews, letters and Poems* (London: Penguin Modern Classics 2001), p.111

⁵² Janet Mckenzie, *Changing Education: A Sociology of Education Since 1944* (Oxford: Routledge 2001), p.146

Throughout the five hundred and thirty eight pages of his highly acclaimed commentary *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* Jonathan Rose never once seeks to present a definition of the term 'working-class'.⁵³ It is taken for granted that the reader understands the phrase. However, partly because the term changes as the twentieth century progresses, this section in my thesis must at least attempt to define the term as I perceive it in order that the reader may better understand the concept of the 'working-class novel'. For the purpose of absolute clarity, however, I need to state that I will make no attempt to define the term 'working-class' as an unambiguous classification; the reason being is that my thesis will cover a lengthy period in history and the fact is that the term evolves as history progresses. Also, (this will become clear as this thesis proceeds) different working-class people interpret their circumstances according to their perspectives. Perspectives are shaped and moulded by a myriad of psychological, financial, religious and personal experiences/beliefs and it may be helpful also to remember that Engels wrote:

In European countries, it took the working class years and years before they fully realised the fact that they formed a distinct [...] class of modern society.⁵⁴

When Tressell and MacGill were writing, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the class-divisions were emerging clearly; there were the 'hands' and the 'brains' and each of these metaphorical references clearly referred to a specific 'class' of individuals. There were hierarchical strata within each group of course, the oft vaunted 'Labour Aristocracy' for example or the super-managers, however, at a basic level the 'hands' dealt with 'things manual' while the 'brains' dealt with 'things cerebral' and thus a 'hand' was just that, a manual 'device' or 'machine' employed for his/her ability to provide labour. At some levels this part-whole metonymy still exists and indeed has become formalised in phrases used for example within the navy like 'deck-hand' or in farming where the term 'field-hand' still

⁵³ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale: University Press, 2001)

⁵⁴ Frederick Engels, Preface to the American Edition of 'The Condition of the Working-Class in England' in *Marx and Engels on Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953) p.8

persists: however by the time the inter-war years arrived the class-system was being re-examined and defined with more exactitude as is reflected in the novels of Lewis Jones and Grassie Gibbon. Post World War Two novels which I shall be examining such as those by Selvon and MacInnes and later still Kevin Sampson show the nature of 'class' becoming even more difficult to define. It should be noted however that the nature of class perceptions, especially in Britain, changes little and Mike Savage indicates that

[...] unlike many nations, there has been little decline in the proportions of people claiming to be working-class. Whereas in most nations, middle-class identities now predominate, usually to an overwhelming degree, around two thirds of Britons indicate that they are working-class in response to survey researchers, a proportion which has changed hardly at all over a fifty year period.⁵⁵

Even more recently an online survey involving over 160,000 people conducted by the BBC and reported in *The Independent*⁵⁶ identifies no less than seven 'classes' in Britain with the 'working-class' being referred to in the survey as 'the traditional working-class' occupying the sixth place with only one class below them; the 'Precariat, or precarious proletariat' which would have been referred to previously as the 'underclass'.

In modern times many people engaged in blue-collar or even white-collar positions in society still see themselves as 'working-class' and with this in mind a more precise distinction might be made in most instances by referring to the 'labouring classes' which indicates that they sell their 'physical' labour for a wage. The term 'labour' however also includes the ability to use the brain to a higher level, thus a clerk who does very little manual labour nonetheless uses a great deal of intellectual labour and may well see his or her self as being working-class.

⁵⁵ Mike Savage, 'Changing Social Class Identities in Post-War Britain: Perspectives from Mass-Observation', Sociological Research online; University of Manchester', <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/3/6.html> published 30th May 2007 (accessed September 8th 2013), p.47

⁵⁶ David Johnson, *The Independent Newspaper* Wednesday April 3rd (2013)

In the novel generally there is a hero or heroine figure central to the story. This seems to be even more so in the working-class novel. Central is the *Bildungsroman* development within a novel, often with the central character participating in a journey which is physical, psychological or spiritual as with Sammy in *How late it was, how late*⁵⁷ or Dermot in *Children of the Dead End*,⁵⁸ sometimes a quest in search of some form of identity as Chris in *A Scots Quair* or in pursuit of an idea as with Owen in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and Perkins in *A Very British Coup*.⁵⁹ The *Bildungsroman* development is often solitary and Lukács felt that working-class writers were potentially able to restore a sense of epic wholeness to literature within such a format because their relationship to the mode of production means that they do not see the world as separate and unrelated, but 'symbiotic'.⁶⁰ Bakhtin also maintains that a novel's basic theme is the hero's inability to deal with the current situation, thus such heroes as Owen and Perkins are individuals in their own right and they are 'private persons' since the hero is 'a solitary man, lost in an alien world'.⁶¹

Given the constant flux and change in terminology what I would like to do is to define my parameters within this thesis in relation to the term 'working-class novel', in my own words, as follows:

Such a novel shall be one written by someone of any gender who regards themselves, or would be so regarded by others at the time of writing, as a member of the working-class or as a writer concerned primarily with the working-class. The subject matter of the novels should encompass problems which are identifiable with or peculiar to, the working-class; strikes, disputes, lock-outs, poverty, class-culture and education.

⁵⁷ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London: Minerva, 1995)

⁵⁸ Patrick Macgill, *Children of the Dead End* (London: New English Library, 1972)

⁵⁹ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010)

⁶⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell UP, 1981), p.184

⁶¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in Michael Holquist (Ed.); Emerson, Caryl and Michael Holquist (translators): *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. (Austin: University of Texas Press. 1981) p.108

It can be seen immediately that this list could be extensive, especially if we employ a method of sub-analysis such as 'any given individual's access to education'. In Britain for example, in the present time, this is not specifically a problem for *the* 'working-class'; however it seems to be more of a problem for a 'working-class' individual given that such individuals are now required to pay quite substantial sums to participate in higher education. Such individuals may have more of an extensive and traditional fear of 'debt'⁶² than the middle-classes who are more likely to be involved in mortgages and investments.⁶³ This traditional fear may well dissuade some working-class students from attending Universities because by so-doing they will automatically incur large debts. Thus it could be argued that working-people have a 'freedom' to attend University in much the same way as they have the 'freedom' to purchase a Rolls Royce.

Many post-war studies seek to define where each of us slots into the class structure⁶⁴ but for the purpose of this thesis such explorations of changing-patterns are irrelevant. Always, throughout the period studied, the 'working-class' have existed and what I define herein as 'the working-class novel' has existed also.

Jameson has argued that all textual 'objects of study' can be shown to reveal and encompass 'the essential antagonistic collective discourses of social classes' and he further develops this to persuasively argue that the development of any novel can be seen as attempting to postulate situations and perhaps solutions which refer to class-divisions.⁶⁵ The

⁶² Will Hutton, 'Growing student debt is entrenching unfairness' in *The Guardian newspaper*, August 9th (2015)

⁶³ Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit. Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), p.41

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1964), Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community* (London: Penguin Books Ltd - New Edition, 1972)

⁶⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell UP, 1981), p.136

defined parameters of this thesis however, I believe, can more easily identify what I consider to be the most relevant questions and dilemmas which relate directly to the working-class, questions which almost every working-class individual is aware of: the inequalities, the differences which clearly exist, the question of *them* and *us*.

Commentators such as Valentine Cunningham make comment on working-class literature but he, in general terms, relays scepticism as to its worth. In *British Writers of the Thirties* for example, which is in many ways an outstanding book analysing among other aspects the preoccupation with violence of many writers of the time, Cunningham appears to exhibit a lack of understanding of the complexities of style relative to the audience whom the novel may attract. He refers for example to Lewis Jones' two novels; *Cwmardy* and *We Live* as novels of 'their sort' and continues to describe their 'faults' thus:

[...] triteness and melodrama of plot, sentimental class chauvinism about workers, urgent dogmatisms, as well as a tendency to make the workers, especially members of the Communist Party, into men and women of excessive heroism and unbelievably steely militancy.⁶⁶

I would not wish to assert that what Cunningham says is totally incorrect or that it is class-based, indeed I shall refer later to my own reservations relating to Jones' tendency to present unrealistic portraits of working-men, but Cunningham's observation seems scant and incomplete because the novels of Jones show also the development of the central characters and establish clear reasons as to why progress and changes occur. Del Valle Alcalá explores the same novels with perhaps more empathy; he points to the central characters, Len and Mary, who both become Communist Party members via very real and concrete experiences, and the author as narrator identifies how their 'power', and thus their progression from angry wage-slaves to political activists, stems from an awareness of class,

⁶⁶ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.309

an awareness of the way the System perceives them. Alcalá also recognises that the position of apparent power as individuals which the two attain is in fact an illusion; they become respected in the community because they are part of a progression which all the workers feel but which many simply cannot articulate, although most are vaguely aware that the need to act in unison is paramount. This is the kind of class consciousness which Lewis Jones portrays so powerfully and Dell Valle Alcalá frames it within a concrete example; following a moment when Len has suddenly become aware of the need to act in unity against the overseer at the pit-face the critical-commentator observes that in this moment of time:

[...] class consciousness is fully realised through the power effect achieved by collective agency – by the demonstrative capacity of co-ordinated workers' direct action. Political (class) awareness is effectuated in a material process in which leadership (as impersonated by Len) merely punctuates the latent possibilities of an already existing collectivity.⁶⁷

It is worth noting also that Montefiore forcefully suggested that the presence of such things as doctrine and party politics in *Cwmardy* and *We Live*⁶⁸ allowed hostile reviewers to dismiss them as propagandist, further stating that it was a perspective stemming from

[...] people who don't bother to read Marxist novels, because they already know that these must be either boringly naturalistic slices of proletarian life, or else even more boring glorifications of grain silos.⁶⁹

And this is where my own personal experience as both an actively political manual-worker in my early life and, more recently, as a psychotherapist allows for what I believe to be a pertinent observation and that is that unless you are exceptionally empathic you need to

⁶⁷ Roberto Del Valle Alcalá, 'Rising with One's Community: Socialist Theory and *Bildungsroman* in Lewis Jones', in *Cultural Studies Journal* Jaume '1' Vol vii (2009), pp.141-155 (p.149)

⁶⁸ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Library of Wales: Parthian, 2010)

⁶⁹ Janet Montefiore, *Men and women writers of the 1930s: the dangerous flood of history* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.148

experience incidents such as the ones described by Lewis Jones and referred to specifically by Alcalá in order to comprehend the full impact of the situations and the descriptions of the situations. Workers glean and gather, almost subconsciously, small victories which are tucked away un-analysed but nonetheless they live and perhaps they surface at a later date in a different form, as political awareness. Alcalá has experienced this either as a reality or through close reading of Lewis Jones' narrative but I feel Cunningham could read the novels repeatedly and never become aware of that particular power which they wield which may indeed only be accessible by working-people who understand events via direct experience or those with highly developed empathic qualities. That is not to say that individuals understand only that which is directly experienced, such an assertion would dismiss much of the research which brought to fruition *Das Kapital*, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* or even *The Communist Manifesto*. I am also aware of the fact that I inserted the word 'either' when discussing how Alcalá arrives at one conclusion while Cunningham arrives at another, but it seems to me as a practising psychologist that there is a reason why Alcalá has an empathic response while Cunningham does not; however the 'reason' is not central to this thesis, it is merely an observation.

To more fully comprehend the nature of a working-class novel it also needs saying that Lewis Jones' novels are not simply propaganda-vehicles from the socialist-realist school of thought. There is an element of that of course because the author, as an active trade unionist and Communist Party of Great Britain member himself,⁷⁰ flies his own (and the CPGB's) flag. However, the two terms taken separately, 'socialist' and 'realist', become in *Cwmardy* and *We Live* something more than labels to attach to a literary style. Take the deaths of Si Spraggs, Bill Bristol and Shoni Cap-Du in underground accidents⁷¹ or the pitiful murder of the child⁷² or the 'young lad' whose arm is torn off;⁷³ these incidents are real and

⁷⁰ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Library of Wales: Parthian, 2010), p.ix

⁷¹ *ibid*; p.429, p.179 & p.129

⁷² *ibid*; p.574

⁷³ *ibid*; p.397

they 'engender through their own dynamics the conditions for a genuine political awakening.'⁷⁴ I propose real as opposed to realistic representation because these were incidents which the author was involved in within the reality which formed his working-life. To put it another way this is not merely realism: it is a description of actual or related events which cause the notion of realism in the literary sense to almost pale into obscurity because of the personal nature of experience and, while not denying the nature of creative talent, it would seem to indicate that if the creative talent lacks direct experience that 'lack' shows as a fault to working-class readers who do have such direct experience. With a slight digress I need to clarify that I am not saying that writers should only write about that which they have experience of. Instead I draw attention to a difference, because that very difference is often the difference between *them* and *us*, and to note that sometimes the author can comprise yet another form of *them*. This can happen intentionally as with McArthur and Kingsley Long⁷⁵ who researched factual events to produce an astonishingly accurate account of Gorbals gang life which can be sociologically and historically researched and shown to be accurate. At other times this may be due to ignorance of the behaviour and attitudes of grass-roots gangsters, as with Graham Greene⁷⁶ who portrays (for example) the gangster (Pinkie) who rules over violent grown criminals as thinly built, indeed almost frail and 'he wasn't a man. He was just a kid.'⁷⁷ He explains the fear of these gangsters with regard to this 'kid' arises because he carries a bottle of acid in his pockets. To working-people, especially those who come into contact with the violent criminal class, Greene's assertions are laughable and unfortunately I can only assert this through personal experience of gangs. Greene used his vivid and ingenious imagination while McArthur and Kingsley Long researched and interviewed then applied their imagination.

⁷⁴ Roberto Del Valle Alcalá, 'Rising with One's Community: Socialist Theory and *Bildungsroman* in Lewis Jones' in *Cultural Studies Journal* Jaume '1' Vol vii (Universidad Autonoma De Madrid, 2009), p.149

⁷⁵ A. McArthur. and H. Kingsley Long, *No Mean City* (London: Corgi, 1957)

⁷⁶ Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Vintage, 2004)

⁷⁷ *ibid*; p.39

To return to my theme; death, especially tragic death, was an everyday part of the lives of miners and their families in the 1930's,⁷⁸ and it is from the tragedies which were commonplace that the seeds of socialism were watered and brought to fruition in the minds of many of the characters in Jones' novels. This is not a heroic dawning of awareness but neither is it entirely melodrama as presented in some kind of fictionalised entertainment although it is labelled thus by critics ill-informed or inexperienced in the real tragedies of working-class life and the everyday struggles of working-people. It may seem like melodrama because of the simply stated heroism of those who soldier on; the miners who take death in their stride and get on with the job at hand, through a necessity which clearly Cunningham has, perhaps fortunately, little first-hand knowledge of. If there is however, a stereotypical element to Jones' creative accounts, it perhaps lies in the 'political' responses of the men involved; I would maintain however that their sociological responses are accurate and historical records are filled with the genuine heroism of such men.

This is not entirely a criticism of Cunningham. What he is saying when he measures the literary 'worth' of Jones' novels in terms of the Leavis and Richards school of literary criticism is valid. Jones' novels do not follow-on-from or expand-upon the styles and methods of presenting literary texts which had become approved by the critical literary hierarchy; they are not in the great tradition but perhaps this is because the authors of such texts/novels had never been immersed in this 'tradition'. What I am suggesting is that such a view as that presented by Leavis, Richards and Cunningham is perhaps somewhat limited and I would further observe that descriptions of a twelve year old boy working at coal-seams in semi-darkness then suddenly having his arm severed by a rock-fall,⁷⁹ or descriptions of men stripped naked drinking cold tea amidst rats and cockroaches each and every day of their lives,⁸⁰ or my own experiences of urinating on chilblained hands in winter to prevent frostbite

⁷⁸ Tim Lambert, 'Local Histories: Daily Life in Britain in the 20th Century'
<http://www.localhistories.org/20thcent.html> (accessed November 7th 2014)

⁷⁹ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Library of Wales: Parthian, 2010), p.397

⁸⁰ *ibid*; p.172

when dry-stone-walling in sub-zero temperatures, may well delude some commentators into believing that they hear, faintly in the background, someone tinkering with out-of-tune ivories and thus they label what they cannot understand as 'melodrama'.

Nonetheless events and situations such as those described are, or at least were, part of the harsh realities of life for most manual workers and I know also from close reading of the texts of authors like Jones, Tressell and Macgill that they have an experience of life which Leavis, Richards, Cunningham and other like-minded commentators have only theoretical access to. This enables these literary commentators only to say that perhaps the words could have been arranged more to their liking in keeping with a tradition which is indubitably theirs; it does not however detract from the impact of the words on myself, or on other members of the working-class. Before proceeding I must make it clear that I am not saying that these individuals entirely lacked life-experience; I am aware, from commentary by MacKillop,⁸¹ that during WW1 Leavis was a stretcher-bearer and surely witnessed the full horrors of war; however his whole life apart from that was spent in Cambridge as a purely academic don and my contention shall be that this restricted confine leaves him short of the knowledge necessary to appreciate the style of writing presented by working men who had probably never read novels by those who are defined within his 'great tradition': Austen, Eliot, Conrad and James. The novelists I will concentrate upon in this thesis have traditions focused mainly on politics and class issues; different, but not to be dismissed because of their limited access to 'great' literature.

What is perhaps less forgivable than Leavis' ignorance and Cunningham's patent lack of hands-on working-class experience of manual work and consequent failure to recognise the authenticity of factual accounts is the failure to determine that the conditions imposed upon these men and their children, whether they are comprehensible or not to critical

⁸¹ Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London: Penguin 1997)

commentators, are imposed deliberately by a System⁸² whose prime concern is profit. Lewis Jones is 'guilty' of writing poor literature in places; he is also 'guilty' of writing about things which many well-fed, middle-class people read as melodrama or perceive as propaganda. Jones' development of Len for example is arguably plotted finely and divided neatly between the two novels, as Del Valle argues:

[Len Roberts develops through both novels] thematically, from initial access, in childhood, to the symbolic horizon of his industrial community (governed by the coalfield and the social structures associated with it), to a full-circle completion of his, and his community's, journey to class-consciousness.⁸³

However, at the time of writing Jones' style was largely unacceptable to conventional or traditional commentators. It is perhaps not that Jones did not understand the structure of the formal bourgeois novel; it is more that Jones 'defied the dictates of the novel form specifically through their handling of personal/public, individual/collective tensions.'⁸⁴

There is of course a paradox to be explored. The nature of the paradox rests within the fact that often, when working-men and women are, as it were, elevated by the very fact that they become novelists, they cease to be working-people in the sense of being those individuals who earn their living by selling their manual labour, novelists perhaps such as James Hanley, Ethel Carney Holdsworth and Kevin Sampson. There is also the difference to be explored with regard to the novels written by Brierley and Hanley insofar as they have been labelled 'working-class literature' as opposed to 'proletarian-writing'.⁸⁵

I intend to present initial chapters which deal with different types of 'conflict' in order to

⁸² 'System' is capitalised where it refers to the current 'System' of Capitalism throughout.

⁸³ Roberto Alcalá Del Valle, 'Rising with One's Community: Socialist Theory and *Bildungsroman* in Lewis Jones' in *Cultural Studies Journal* Jaume '1' Vol vii (Universidad Autonoma De Madrid, 2009), p.142

⁸⁴ Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p.191

⁸⁵ Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: a Test Case' in *Red Letters* issue 3; Autumn 1976, (p.118)

explore and to raise the profile of, various notions of *them* and *us* and of course I will refer only to working-class novels, albeit with the concessions, definitions and restrictions defined herein. Commentaries included will comprise novels which some may well argue are 'other' which are written by authors who are not easily identifiable as stemming from the working-class but which nonetheless deal with problems central to the working-class. These will be discussed and analysed to present as it were another viewpoint, and will in their turn be weighed alongside the perspectives of authors who have no pretence to being working-class but who nonetheless deal with issues pertinent to the working-class or which explore the lives of working-people. Saunders Lewis, and Chris Mullin perhaps belong to this latter group.

Within this thesis my aim is to introduce the reader to the notion of that which constitutes a working-class novel, to explore how people define/use the oft-uttered phrase which refers to *them* and *us* and by so doing to raise a debate which hopefully others will develop. However, I feel it is important at this point to identify diverse voices within the working-class novel.

Chapter three

The voices of the Novel

Central to my thesis is the 'message' imparted by novels. Sometimes this is to the fore as for example in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* where the author states clearly that he has intent to not only inform and to entertain but to educate the reader. At other times the 'message' may be speculative and designed to deliberately provoke debate as perhaps with *A Very British Coup*, and it may even be that certain novelists believe that they are merely providing entertainment with a smattering of social comment as in *This Sporting Life*⁸⁶ or *Goalkeepers are Different*.⁸⁷ I will also, perhaps provocatively, suggest that in some instances the authors have an unpopular or different agenda which they may well not wish to broadcast over-enthusiastically, as in *The Furies*⁸⁸ or *Means-Test Man*.⁸⁹ I maintain that with regard to working-class novels especially, the voice(s) of the novel is/are of the utmost importance. These 'voices' need to be identified if that is possible, even if that means investigating and exploring the novelist's background and his/her 'values'.

When a reader engages with a novel they engage with a narrative form, and thus the implication is that throughout the joint enterprise of reading any given novel the reader is being relayed a story which is narrated by 'someone'. At source, the story stems from the author. However the author may choose to consciously introduce a narrator who presents a particular 'slant' on the story which is unfurling. This introduced or secondary narrator may, or may not, be reliable.

In certain instances the narrator is straightforwardly identified and interventions are clear and presumed to be honest reflections of said narrator's 'opinions'. For Tressell the narrator is

⁸⁶ David Storey, *This Sporting Life* (London: Vintage, 2000)

⁸⁷ Brian Glanville, *Goalkeepers are Different* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974)

⁸⁸ James Hanley, *The Furies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983)

⁸⁹ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011)

Owen who not only tells the story but who intervenes also to voice his opinions. Thus the reader finds no difficulty in addressing an 'opinion' set alongside a story when it is presented so openly and s/he may choose to accept the perspective of the narrator or to engage as it were in a dialogue with such a narrator if the reader's 'opinion', either as to what is being said or the interpretation of the information, differs from that of the narrator. Thus dialectic is created; conversation is present between the reader and the narrative.

Tressell's narrator relates a story in which the central enemies of the working-class appear to be the working-class themselves who form what Mitchell perceptively refers to as 'this mental fifth column'⁹⁰ and the author intervenes to inform the reader of his opinion, for example, as to how the characters within the novel are behaving. The narrator also presents a political opinion and makes no effort whatsoever to hide from the reader his opinion that the world should be ordered in a specific way. There exists in Tressell's only novel a narrator who intervenes with the express intent of educating the reader to the notion of a solution to an envisaged problem.

I have also referred previously to the fact that *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is frequently referred to as *The Builders' Bible* or *The Painters' Bible*. The word 'bible' reflects its aura of authority and also, as Peter Miles suggests, 'a familiar manual of techniques and instruction'.⁹¹ The novel details the lives of ordinary working-people being written by a man working in the building industry as a painter and decorator. In order to have achieved this alternative title it is arguable that many of those who have read the book relate to its 'authority', for a 'bible' is indeed an instruction manual but it is also something to be revered.

⁹⁰ Jack Mitchell, 'Early Harvest: Three Anti-Capitalist Novels published in 1914' in Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.69

⁹¹ Peter Miles, 'The Painter's Bible and the British Workman: Robert Tressell's Literary Activism' in Jeremy Hawthorn (Ed.), *The British Working-Class novel in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p.11

The idea of a manual of instruction is useful when examining the role of the narrator in this particular novel. The central character is a man of meticulous attention to detail in his work but also in his politics: he is as aware of the correct way to hang wallpaper:

[...] unless the paperhanger laps the joints – which should not be done – they are apt to open a little as the paper dries and to show the white wall underneath⁹²

as he is as to how to present to uneducated workers Marx's theories of surplus values in the chapter entitled 'The Reign of Terror. The Great Money Trick'.⁹³ Tressell, perhaps more than any other British novelist, follows Lukács' assertion that novelists should take a critical perspective and not merely reflect the despair and futility which they perceive; it is the novelist's duty to suggest alternatives, not merely to hold up a mirror to society.⁹⁴ With this in mind it is safe to presume that the author is outside of the work and that the narrator, in this instance, is part of it.

As a general rule that may well be the case; however, writers frequently use life-experience as a basis of that which they write, whether the novel is claimed to be autobiographical or not. Tressell states in his introduction to *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* that his purpose in writing is to present a 'faithful picture of working-class life'⁹⁵ and he makes no secret of the fact that he also has a political purpose when he further adds that he intends

[...] to show the conditions relating from poverty and unemployment: to expose the futility of the measures taken to deal with them and to indicate what I believe to be the only real remedy, namely--Socialism. I intended to explain what Socialists

⁹² Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.433

⁹³ *ibid*; pp.225-229

⁹⁴ Georg Lukács, *Solzhenitsyn* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1971), p.17

⁹⁵ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.11

understand by the word 'poverty': to define the Socialist theory of the causes of poverty, and to explain how Socialists propose to abolish poverty.⁹⁶

The author could not make it clearer. His intent was to write a politically-orientated novel showing conditions as he saw them at the time and to offer a solution to the perceived unfairness of the System.

It is also known from historical records that the author is well acquainted with his subject(s); his life was spent working as a house-painter among the men he describes in his novel and his political life was also expansive being the Secretary of the Transvaal Federated Building Trades Council and also being elected onto the committee at the launch of the International Independent Labour Party in 1899.⁹⁷ Because of the author's stated aims and his background it is safe to assume that the 'hero' of the novel, who is also the narrator at times, could be said to be voicing the opinions of the author.

Some novels however are clearly intended to be read as pure fiction. And yet they are surely still influenced by the life experiences of the author because using fiction as a vehicle to entertain or to make comment is often an attempt to make personal experiences universal. Tressell's novel, due to the way it is constructed, becomes a work of fiction because the events and the timescale contained therein are condensed and 'fictionalised' in order to present an entertaining narrative albeit one based on factual experience, thus Tressell's novel can be viewed as a work of fiction which, almost as an aside, entertains, advocates and informs.

What however if an author has something to say which is unpalatable or controversial? It then perhaps becomes prudent to introduce a voice, or even voices, which are as it were

⁹⁶ *ibid*

⁹⁷ Dave Harker, *Tressell: The real story of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Zed Books; 2003), p.7

'permitted' to present 'alternatives'. I shall contend, in chapter eight specifically, that Hanley employs voices to present what may well be his own perspectives and prejudices. I shall further contend that in some cases what may appear to be straightforward narrative recording of events is in fact presented with a bias, either intentional or not, which disguises generally unfashionable perspectives by concentrating on certain facts as opposed to others. I shall argue also that what is presented by the apparently unbiased narrator in *Means Test Man* may be a truth but it is a much debated truth, a minority report as it were. That is not to say that the author is being deliberately deceitful but that what he has to say is/was not generally the prevalent view, that it flowed against mainstream opinion and that he almost certainly knew it to be a controversial perspective.

Narration is not always a solo performance however. Voices can be many and myriad and sometimes the voice of the narrator runs into the voices of the characters with the role of third-person narrator devolving as it were and mingling with the voices of central characters as in Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*. The product of this is a peculiar intimacy wherein the reader may feel 'at home' or as being treated as 'confidant', this as opposed to the more traditional role of a compliant reader who is simply a receptacle for the ideas as presented in the novel. These voices produce an intimacy that is dialectically opposed to the alienation which is often present when the reader is simply being told a story. The result is that the reader is given time to reassess and to consider alternate perspectives.

A solo voice or a choir of voices then may be open and observable to a reader who may accept the 'message', ignore it or even enter into a debate with it. Within this thesis novels such as *A Very British Coup*, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, and *This Slavery*⁹⁸ fall into this category. It may however also be that the voice of the author or commentator is tentatively exploring a controversy or an unpopular perspective to elicit a response, to provoke the reader or even in order that the author may further explore and clarify his/her

⁹⁸ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011)

own perspectives. I would tentatively suggest that into this category may fall novels such as; *The Furies* and *Means-Test Man*.

What I am sure of is that if we are to explore the real 'meaning' of these working-class novels and to cast some light upon the diverse notions which constitute *them* and *us* then it is important to identify the voices-within for these voices are the essence of what actually makes them working-class. These voices, even when they stem from a discontent-with or even a dislike-of the working-class, offer an opportunity for debate. In order to do this fully it is necessary to also explore some of the history and identity of the authors; such explorations reveal the direct and forthright voice of Tressell or perhaps may cast light on the somewhat hesitant voices of Hanley and Brierley. It is hoped also that with most of the novels discussed herein the voice(s) will shed light upon the quest to identify *them* and *us* and it may even transpire that the author(s) themselves at times become either *them* or *us*.

Part one: identification

Chapter four

Sport and education

Barry Hines was born in a mining village near Barnsley where his father worked as a miner; he attended Ecclesfield Grammar School and played football for the England Grammar Schools' team. He left school without any qualifications to work for the National Coal Board as an apprentice surveyor at Rockingham Colliery although quite soon after he returned to school to continue his 'A' level studies. From there he attended Loughborough University to study PE and then worked as a PE teacher for several years in inner city comprehensive schools.⁹⁹ In an interview in 2004 for the BBC Hines stated that he wanted to write novels that had 'real working-class men and women as their main characters',¹⁰⁰ in the same interview Hines stated that *The Blinder* was 'based to a certain extent on himself and his aspirations; an extremely gifted academic with four 'A' levels and a talented footballer with the opportunity of playing for Manchester United.'¹⁰¹

The hero of *The Blinder* is Lennie Hawk, named by his father after the 'legendary' football genius, Lennie Silver,¹⁰² and as his story is complex I need to outline the story briefly. Lennie Hawk is eighteen¹⁰³ and is a student in the upper-sixth at his local Grammar School, his father is a mine-worker and his 'mates' are Frank and Bill who work down the pit; the latter queries his still being at school and not earning a wage but with due regard to what might be seen as a mainly middle-class notion of deferred gratification,¹⁰⁴ Lennie's attitude is 'Money's

⁹⁹ Barry Hines, *The Blinder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.1

¹⁰⁰ Barry Hines, 'Sense of Place: Yorkshire People: Barry Hines' on BBC: May 2004
http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/sense_of_place/sy_people/barry_hines.shtml
 (accessed November 4th 2014)

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

¹⁰² Barry Hines, *The Blinder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.156

¹⁰³ *ibid*; p.66

¹⁰⁴ Francis G. Caro, 'Deferred Gratification, Time Conflict, and College Attendance' in *Sociology of Education* Vol. 38, No. 4 (Summer, 1965), (American Sociological Association, 1965), pp. 332-340

not everything'.¹⁰⁵ Such certainty however is not always evident and despite being a talented footballer and a brilliant scholar Lennie is always unsure how to really plan out his life. His most consistent loyalty is to his family, especially his father who has a dream that the local football club 't'Town' will once again become the kind of team they had been in his youth.¹⁰⁶ Lennie is being head-hunted by the top teams in the country and he also has either a desire, or something implanted via conditions of worth by his family, to go to University, despite the fact that with all of his commitments and with his mother and father constantly arguing at home¹⁰⁷ he fails to do his home-work or hands it in so late he is penalised for it and berated for having the wrong attitude by his history teacher.¹⁰⁸ To complicate matters, this same history teacher has a wife with whom Lennie is having an affair.¹⁰⁹

In his sometimes chaotic home however, where his mother is subject to the odd lash across the face from her husband,¹¹⁰ the dominant aura is one of family commitment and loyalty, a place where the ten pounds a week Lennie gets illegally as 'expenses' for playing football is laid in full on the table for his mother;¹¹¹ a peculiarly working-class trait which is mirrored by Ronnie Blake in Glanville's novel *Goalkeepers are Different*.¹¹² Lennie's loyalty to his father allows no snobbery for when he is asked to have a drink with the Boss of 't'Town' who is also his father's employer Lennie will only go if his father comes too.¹¹³ After a game in which he scored two goals he is unmoved by the lavish praise of girls and supporters and instead, when they are walking home together, he asks his father for his opinion and his father's 'Tha played a blinder'¹¹⁴ is what matters to him.

¹⁰⁵ Barry Hines, *The Blinder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.25

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*; p.132

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*; p.121

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*; p.116

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*; p.140

¹¹⁰ *ibid*; p.120

¹¹¹ *ibid*; p.66

¹¹² Brian Glanville, *Goalkeepers are Different* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974), p.63

¹¹³ Barry Hines, *The Blinder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.83

¹¹⁴ *ibid*; p.85

The instances of *them* and *us* which occur in *The Blinder* are, as stated earlier, complex; they need to be because Lennie is a complex character. Mature for his years, he never resolves a combination of diverse loyalties which can be roughly summarised thus: on the one hand he is a pupil in the Upper-Sixth and he is aware that going to University is an option which will ensure that he does not have to make his living from the pits. However, his response when asked by one of his mates who is working in the pit for a living if he is definitely going to University is 'I don't know as I'm bothered.'¹¹⁵ Lennie is also a talented football-player who apparently can play for any team he cares to sign for and again the reader is informed very early in the novel that 'every Manager in the first division' is trying to sign him.¹¹⁶ Lennie's common refrain however when asked why he has not taken up such offers is 'I don't know'.¹¹⁷

The divisions which produce a conflict are between a *them* and an *us* who live and play in two different worlds, perhaps best summed up as the division represented by two public houses: The Anchor, where Lennie and his friends drink, and the Queens Head where Leary, the directors of the club and the Captains of Industry drink. And even within the pubs there are divisions; in The Anchor the lads drink in 't'taproom'¹¹⁸ where the dartboard is; however when they have money in their pockets and girls in tow they drink in the slightly more up-market 't'best room'.¹¹⁹ It is in t'best room, when Lennie brings Leary's daughter Jane for a drink, that one of the divisions between *them* and *us* surface.

The divisions are complex and evolve slowly in a beautifully written passage¹²⁰ revealing layers of conflict that encompass class-divisions and the divisions which beset Lennie with regard to his future. It begins with a slight conflict between Lennie and Jane as to whether

¹¹⁵ *ibid*; p.25

¹¹⁶ *ibid*; p.13

¹¹⁷ *ibid*; p.15 & p.25

¹¹⁸ *ibid*; p.89

¹¹⁹ *ibid*; p.88

¹²⁰ *ibid*; pp.87-93

they should drink in The Anchor or the Queens Head and Lennie wins the argument. When they enter he draws attention to the divisions within the pub between the two rooms available, pointing out that his mates are in 't'best room' because 'they've got a woman apiece'.¹²¹ When the six of them sit together (Frank and Bill, with their girlfriends Sylvia and Irene, plus Lennie and Jane) Lennie begins mockingly quoting Shakespeare and then provocatively introduces the working-class girls to Jane as 'Sylvia and Irene [...] They work for your dad.'¹²² Then Sylvia opines, 'We'll have to watch what we're saying tonight, Irene, else there'll be us cards waiting for us on Monday morning.'¹²³ This is a remark which exposes quite graphically the class-differences which are part of the interplay; on the one hand it is a piece of harmless pub-banter whilst on the other it is a sharp observation of the reality that in fact Jane's father does indeed hold the fate of the two girls ('us') in his hand. The point is amplified when Jane tries to ingratiate herself in company which she is unused to by observing; 'They say father's terrible to work for.' But the reply from Irene is again down-to-earth yet totally factual; 'We don't see much of him. But everybody's scared stiff when he comes round.'¹²⁴ Reiterating the uneven balance of power betwixt *them* and *us*. The tension rises amidst banter when an incident at Leary's factory is recalled during which 'a lass' was caught smoking 'behind them bales' and Jane's father sacked her in a flurry of temper during which he also admonishes the manager 'Old Thompson'. The sacked girl then starts crying. Following a comment by Irene that being sacked for smoking is a bit harsh for such a 'little thing' Jane then leaps in with 'Smoking isn't a little thing down the mill,' followed by a retort from one of the girls that 'you're bound to be on your dad's side'.¹²⁵ The mill-girls then appeal to Lennie that a 'warning' might have been enough instead of sacking the girl. Interestingly Lennie takes Jane's side and responds quite adamantly with 'No, would it buggery.' And to parry a remark from Sylvia that he is just siding with Jane he points out that it is a paper-mill and smoking is dangerous and when the girls continue to defend the

¹²¹ *ibid*; p.88

¹²² *ibid*; p.89

¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ *ibid*; p.90

¹²⁵ *ibid*; p.91

smoker's actions he storms, 'You know nothing! You'd have done t'smack same thing in them circumstances.' There follows a silence but Lennie will not let it go and makes his point yet again by picking up Sylvia's glass of Babycham as if to drink it. And when she objects stating that 'it's mine' he points out how things could escalate if he did drink it and refused to buy her another and she called the landlord and tried to get him thrown out; 'You're all t'bloody same aren't you? Whether it's paper mill or rotten glass of Babycham.'¹²⁶

The them/us dilemma for Lennie is patently obvious; he is of their class, yet he is out drinking with the Boss's daughter, and although his working-class mates and their girl-friends may presume he is just 'taking sides' it is much more likely that he simply sees the dangers of smoking amongst bales of paper. And he does not win anyone over, not even his best friend Frank who chips in with; 'It's same at t'pit. There's more safety regulations stuck up and down'¹²⁷ but Lennie will not let it go and has the final word before the group separates with; 'That's because you don't take any notice of 'em.'¹²⁸

Of course, superficially this is a petty incident in the pub, something said 'over ale' as my working-class friends would have phrased it. But the divisions and the dilemmas are very real. Lennie is drifting away from his roots for many reasons. There are the divisions between *them* and *us*, class divisions resulting from education, talent and desire, with Lennie's family and income dependent on Leary and his ilk for their very food and clothing. However these are not so easily detectable when other options open up. The difficulty is amplified when later, discussing the incident with Jane, she observes and comments upon the difference between Lennie and his friends: 'You're growing away from *them*'¹²⁹ (my italics) and Lennie's response is poignant and heartfelt: 'I envy 'em sometimes, they're

¹²⁶ *ibid*; p.92

¹²⁷ *ibid*; p.92

¹²⁸ *ibid*

¹²⁹ *ibid*; p.93

satisfied with what they've got.'¹³⁰ Clearly the benefits of intelligence, a rare talent for football and an education, also have their downsides and the roots that set *us* into whichever camp we chose to exist-in or are forced to exist-in are complex and run deep. *Them* or *us*, these divisions too are sometimes tribal and ingrained; social-mobility from one to the other is seldom easy but there is sometimes an element of choice. Unlike the direct conflict which will be discussed in future chapters, here we witness divisions within the various strata which form 'class' as Lennie, intellectually and emotionally, sees even his close friends as being different, as being a form of *them*. This raises a possibility that the very concept of *us* may well contain sub-divisions or may not even be a valid concept; in some ways this is akin to the divisions within the class-structure which are explored more fully in chapter six, divisions which are determined by gender. Saunders Lewis draws attention to the women in families 'withholding their 'good-mornings' and 'good-afternoons' from acquaintances and neighbours which has the effect of securing 'each family's social standing'.¹³¹ Lennie not only recognises differences but he confronts them with his words and his actions.

Lennie's realisation that he has a dilemma leads on to his revealing to Jane his 'dream' wherein a 'golden ball' which he kicks bursts the nets of a goal and flies up in the sky to sit there alongside the sun in the heavens.¹³² It is however a dream which comes to a kind of magic-realism fruition when a penalty which he scores-with in a match against Manchester United does just that; it breaks the net and disappears into the sky. At the end of this game he resolves his own personal dilemma concerning *them* and *us*, at least insofar as his own developing sense of right and wrong is concerned, by blatantly fouling an opposition player and being sent off; then he throws the money he had been paid to 'fix' the self-same match into the face of the Club's director, who happens to be Leary, Jane's Dad, as the whistle goes and the opposition win the match. This is either a stubborn and self-centred 'gut' reaction or it is a deliberate and class-based act of solidarity exercised by repudiating *them*

¹³⁰ *ibid*

¹³¹ Saunders Lewis, *Monica* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997), p.37

¹³² Barry Hines, *The Blinder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.94

and their basic lack of morality; a scene in which one of *us* identifies and repudiates a System which seeks to influence working-people through the manipulation of wealth and power as unfairly exercised by *them*.

David Storey, author of *This Sporting Life*,¹³³ was a former professional Rugby League player and son of a miner who was born in 1933 in Wakefield, and studied at the Slade School of Art. He was the winner of the 1976 Booker Prize.¹³⁴ This novel deals with working-class themes of alienation and attempts to escape from poverty, to find a comfortable place on the social ladder without betraying the roots of self.

Storey's novel concerns the career of a working-class lad Arthur Machin. He is a man who, like Ronnie Blake in *Goalkeepers are Different*, narrates the story about himself. Arthur is a semi-professional Rugby League player who also works as a lathe turner in a factory.¹³⁵ He is a man who, like Lennie's Dad in *The Blinder*, is not averse to slapping women in front of their children¹³⁶ or to wrecking their house in a fit of temper.¹³⁷ He is a man clearly, though over-simply, identified as a misogynist who feels most at home in the club Booth with its 'oak-panelled walls and timbered ceiling' and its

[...] coats of arms [...] decorating the room (where) the absence of women, made this my favourite meeting place of the week.¹³⁸

He is a man who is described also as being like a wild animal; an 'ape',¹³⁹ a 'big lion',¹⁴⁰ 'a great hooded bear',¹⁴¹ or a 'super ape'.¹⁴² Arthur Machin is certainly a very macho man who

¹³³ David Storey, *This Sporting Life* (London: Vintage, 2000)

¹³⁴ *ibid*; p.1

¹³⁵ *ibid*; p.103

¹³⁶ *ibid*; p.143

¹³⁷ *ibid*; p.144

¹³⁸ *ibid*; p.150

¹³⁹ *ibid*; pp.163-4

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*; p.94

¹⁴¹ *ibid*; p.210

though he likes to read cheap paperbacks about sport, especially boxing,¹⁴³ is very much at home being ruthless and violent both to women and to the rugby-opposition. To some extent he is a man whose physical size and talent for rugby traps him into the role he enacts in his life and there are echoes of the ruthless gang-leader Johnnie Stark¹⁴⁴ in his make-up. There are signs of his desire to be something 'other', manifested in his clumsy attempts to woo and to love the widow Valerie Hammond, referred to almost entirely (by himself as narrator) throughout the novel as 'Mrs. Hammond' even when he is tending her in the private room he has arranged at the Municipal Hospital as she dies. The prefix is interesting as it indicates some respect for her as a widow but also suggests that she, in some way, always 'belongs' to her ex-husband. During his time at her side when she is in a coma following a stroke he observes that 'I was just like an... ape with her. I must have knocked her about -emotionally- more than I thought.'¹⁴⁵ It is both revealing and poignant that he adds the word 'emotionally' as a qualification which perhaps justifies his actions to his 'self'. He is justifying, or at least qualifying, his own instincts and there is a very real sense that one of those identified as *them* in this novel is a *them* that is the other side of 'macho' Arthur, the tender side, which he finds it almost impossible to make contact with. On the one hand he feels women can be slotted into a box thus; 'Mothers or prostitutes – that's women.'¹⁴⁶ Yet he is also someone who struggles like some inarticulate animal to express his tenderness towards Mrs. Hammond; he cares that she is the only woman he knows who does not smoke cigarettes¹⁴⁷ and he feels he 'owe[s] her *something*,¹⁴⁸ (author's italics) and also that he is very alone without her.¹⁴⁹ Most importantly he has a vague sense, which comes to fruition as Mrs. Hammond is dying, that in his world women are as-they-are because of men and that

¹⁴² *ibid*; p.211

¹⁴³ *ibid*; pp.25, 28 & 175

¹⁴⁴ A. McArthur and H. Kingsley Long, *No Mean City* (London: Corgi, 1957)

¹⁴⁵ David Storey, *This Sporting Life* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.233

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*; p.209

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.148

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*; p.232

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*

because of this each gender is alien to the other, he identifies perhaps a *them* and *us* which is masculine on the one hand and feminine on the other:

For the first time I saw how she had been – without Eric, [her deceased husband] without me. It was the girl, and the laugh [...] Every minute passed as a second in the quietness as we made the effort to recognize each other.¹⁵⁰

His inability to ‘admit’ to loving her, which he presumed all along that she knew,¹⁵¹ means that his providing for her physical needs as she dies is all that he can do. He struggles to admit to himself that he loves her, so how can he ever voice those words to her? There is another sense of *them* and *us* here which will be addressed more fully in chapter six; the sense that the division between the sexes is the most dominant *them* and *us* of all. Virginia Woolf stated in 1929 that ‘virility has now become self-conscious’ and that this produces books which ‘celebrate male virtues, enforce male values and describe the world of men’¹⁵² and *This Sporting Life* is surely one of these.

Brian Glanville, author of *Goalkeepers are Different*,¹⁵³ is decidedly not working-class; he was educated at Charterhouse School of which the one-time Labour Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley proclaimed in 2007, ‘its existence allows the rich and the powerful to ignore the world beyond its boundaries.’¹⁵⁴ Glanville worked most of his life as a football correspondent for the *Sunday Times*.

As a boy Glanville’s home life was unorthodox and he was brought up in a comfortable middle-class, though oddly secular, home. His Dublin-born father - who Glanville said was

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*; p.238

¹⁵¹ *ibid*; p.162

¹⁵² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Flamingo–Harper Collins, 1994), pp.109-110

¹⁵³ Brian Glanville, *Goalkeepers are Different* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974)

¹⁵⁴ Roy Hattersley, ‘Roy Hattersley visits Charterhouse’ in *The Guardian Newspaper* London: July 17th 2007

‘very Jewish and very Irish’¹⁵⁵ - had changed the family name from Goldberg to Glanville and Brian Glanville, despite the alleged secularity of his upbringing, underwent a bar mitzvah; a process which he described as ‘boring’ because ‘The learning of it took up my school holidays, which I really didn't like.’¹⁵⁶

Perhaps as a consequence of the author's relatively privileged upbringing the novel lacks something in painting a background relevant to the main working-class characters, specifically the central character Ronnie Blake. When referring to a text's ‘social relevance’ Tompkins states that ‘until the text is rightly understood it cannot be evaluated’,¹⁵⁷ and I would further maintain that until the nuances of language in cultural terms are understood then the author is sometimes unable to evaluate correctly what s/he hears or alternatively, s/he relies upon something other than direct observation; thus when reading *Goalkeepers are Different* I find that Glanville's observations of working-class vernacular clash with my own experiences. Ronnie Blake for example seems to only superficially recognise the hardships attached to working-class life. I certainly find it difficult to relate to a phrase in the introduction which would have it that ‘Realism is the keynote of the story’.¹⁵⁸ In the sense of ‘realism’ as a literary technique analogous with Flaubert and Tolstoy's representation of the everyday experiences of individuals in literary works this statement may well have elements of truth in it, but if we look at the broader notion of realism it is possible to argue that while the descriptions of the on-field action are realistic the rest is an area where the author is clearly unguided by ‘real’ experience. For example the reader is ‘shown’ working-class traits or traditions as when another goalkeeper Harry Vaughan ‘explains’ why he wears an ancient threadbare cap: ‘First cap I bought when I went to work on a building site. Had it ever since.’

¹⁵⁵ Simon Yaffe, ‘Brian Glanville, one of the greatest ever football writers, talks to Simon Yaffe’ in *Jewish Telegraph* (2010) http://www.jewishtelegraph.com/prof_73.html (accessed February 9th 2015)

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*

¹⁵⁷ Jane P. Tompkins, ‘The Reader in History, the Changing Shape of Literary Response’ in Jane P. Tompkins, (Ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.205

¹⁵⁸ Brian Glanville, *Goalkeepers are Different* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974), p.2

And then the narrator observes, 'you find a lot of that sort of thing in football.'¹⁵⁹ The author does not recognise this action as genuine working-class affection for the past and its connections to family but attributes it to something in 'football'. It is interesting to compare this, for example, with the actions of Lennie in *The Blinder* who simply reflects security and warmth when using his father's old scarf to shield him from the night air: 'Lennie knotted his Dad's pit scarf and tucked the fringes inside his coat.'¹⁶⁰ Similar incidents occur throughout Glanville's novel, subtly indicating that the author is relating second-hand or alien experiences as opposed to 'real' personal familiarity with the working-class. Glanville is effectively one of *them* who is writing about *us*, and in places, it shows.

Ronnie Blake, the 'hero'/narrator, is a London lad of working-class origins who, when the novel opens is aged twelve, maybe thirteen.¹⁶¹ It traces the rise of Ronnie from a schoolboy with talent to a star of the field who makes possible a win for his team in 'The Cup' when aged just nineteen.¹⁶² It is a romantic story, lacking core realism but which does occasionally have some success identifying a credible *them* albeit with commentary which again indicates the author/narrator's insecurity when calling a working-class instrument of labour a spade. I feel it is acceptable to identify this failing as mainly belonging to the author as opposed to Ronnie as narrator because the disjointedness and contradictions seem out of place in the mouth of a working-class lad. It is subtle, and I do not feel it is appropriate to expand on this apparent weakness in the novel in too much depth, but it is worth keeping in mind in order to qualify the observations which follow. One example is the oft repeated comment that compares footballers (and goalkeepers) to 'performing dogs'¹⁶³ and our hero's inability to see that it is his 'class' who are being manipulated in this manner. Ronnie recognises 'hangers-on' as having 'one thing in common, they all of them want something from you'¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*; p.41

¹⁶⁰ Barry Hines, *The Blinder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p.211

¹⁶¹ Brian Glanville, *Goalkeepers are Different* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974), p.9

¹⁶² *ibid*; p.168

¹⁶³ *ibid*; p.143

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*

but he fails to recognise this same trait in the managers and bosses or as being part of a System which essentially favours *them*.

Ronnie is from a working-class family, his Dad however is not a pit-worker or a navvy but a post-man, a relatively secure job requiring a shirt and tie which in the seventies would have been seen as something slightly superior to 'manual working-class'. The difference is subtle but centres around the hardship involved; postal-workers do not for example actually get their hands dirty, they are also visible in the community and usually welcomed and respected, known affectionately as 'posties'. Ronnie fails to see this distinction and describes his father's occupation thus:

[...] my old man, when he talks about the Post Office, like it was something to be grateful to, something that always looked after him. Whereas to me it was just a job. If it was steady it was because *no one else wanted it*, the hours were so long, there was so much walking and the pay was so low.¹⁶⁵ (my italics)

That he misses the point about security and clean hands being a 'step-up' may indicate Ronnie's naivety as opposed to the author's lack of awareness or personal experience, however such observations certainly indicate a culture-gap which is common to many of the sporting 'heroes' discussed in this chapter. Ronnie's observation, on the same theme, that '[...] my father and mother were marvellous, we never went without anything [...] but this was *now*, and now was all we knew',¹⁶⁶ (author's italics) seems to this reader to indicate that again, it is the author speaking about something he knows little about at first hand. In working-class families the conditions of worth and the constant talk of the struggle to make ends meet would have ingrained a 'knowledge' of the past into Ronnie's very fibre as is recognised in *This Sporting Life* where the threat of being cast back into simply being a lathe-worker is ever present. Similarly in both of Hines' novels where the 'threat' of 'the pit' is

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*; p.30

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*

a driving force for Billy Casper in *A Kestrel for a Knave* and an awareness of the roots which he sprang from for Lennie Hawk in *The Blinder*.

One of Ronnie's co-players, Bob Cullen, seems to have a clear indication as to how the players are manipulated by the Bosses and when he is fined £100.00 and dropped to the reserves' list for talking to the news media he comments to Ronnie, 'I reckon they're one way, these contracts, all for the club and nothing for the player.' And another player comments; 'Have you only just worked that out?'¹⁶⁷ Ronnie though finds such talk alien and he has little concept as to how much of a commodity he is and when he mocks the notion by asking sarcastically if there are 'different contracts' the response, 'There's no different contract. We're all peasants the lot of us', brings the unspoken thought from Ronnie that this is something 'I couldn't see.'¹⁶⁸ It is not all that our hero cannot see; he merely observes, without comment, Billy Wallis being 'sacked', Tommy Dougal being 'sacked' and Bob Cullen being 'sold' in the space of a few days¹⁶⁹ and yet apparently the suggestion that 'We're all peasants the lot of us' still fails to penetrate his consciousness. The phrase 'There's no different contract. We're all peasants the lot of us' is arguably a valid working-class observation but it surely loses impact by being placed in the mouth of a peripheral character and, I would maintain, is indicative of the author's uncertainty with his chosen scenario. Glanville's 'textual structures' seem slightly unstable when perceived via this reader's 'structured acts of comprehension'.¹⁷⁰

*A Kestrel for a Knave*¹⁷¹ is a novel about a working-class boy growing up in the nineteen-sixties educational system which is, in many areas, failing him. Although primarily the novel deals with alienation it also deals with certain aspects of what might be referred to as 'sport'.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*; p.168

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*; p.168

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*; pp.168-9

¹⁷⁰ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.107

¹⁷¹ Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977)

Our 'hero', Billy Casper, is fifteen years old¹⁷² and is confronting violence at almost every turn be it from his mother,¹⁷³ his half-brother Jud,¹⁷⁴ school bullies¹⁷⁵ or teachers.¹⁷⁶ The formal educational system is failing him, with the noticeable exception of a single teacher, Mr. Farthing, and as Billy has recently given up mixing with the gangs he has become essentially a loner whose primary interest is in animals especially his trained (not 'tamed') kestrel. Despite the fact that he has no interest whatsoever in organised sport, especially football,¹⁷⁷ he does have an interest in the 'sport' of falconry at which he is an 'expert', as is recognized by Mr. Farthing and Billy's peers when he is coaxed into talking about the subject in class.¹⁷⁸ Although small of stature, Casper is an accomplished athlete who can shin trees¹⁷⁹ and climb crumbly high stone walls in the dead of night¹⁸⁰ as well as being able to entertain his peers with some acrobatics in the goal mouth when forced to play there as goal keeper.¹⁸¹ His single determination in life is that he will not work down the pit like his brother Jud and the School Employment Office expect or advise.¹⁸²

Billy is also a thief, and he lies about being a thief; to be more specific he is successful in covering up his misdemeanours by amending the truth. Thieving is perhaps excusable as when the novel opens with him rising from his bed to get breakfast he discovers only vinegar and dried peas on the pantry shelves.¹⁸³ Thus on his way to complete his paper round he steals chocolate from his employer¹⁸⁴ and orange juice from the milk float.¹⁸⁵ A generous observer might label him as 'resourceful'. And when he steals the eyas kestrel from its nest

¹⁷² *ibid*; p.93

¹⁷³ *ibid*; p.19

¹⁷⁴ *ibid*; p.75

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*; p.53

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*; p.58

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*; pp.83-4

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*; pp.64-70

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*; pp.26-27

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*; p.42

¹⁸¹ *ibid*; p.98

¹⁸² *ibid*; p.139

¹⁸³ *ibid*; p.9

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*; p.12

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*; p.13

and is quizzed as to where he got it by Mr. Farthing he replies that he 'found it' and that, 'It must have tumbled from a nest'.¹⁸⁶ These are necessary lies from a young boy who feels alienated from everything the System has to offer him, including 'family' and even the well-meaning Mr. Farthing.

The identifiable instances of *them* and *us* in this particular novel of Hines' are numerous; on one hand there is the formality of the education system which teaches by violence and rote and where even the library has rules that seem to keep Billy from pursuing knowledge.¹⁸⁷ This is set alongside Billy's own pursuit of education which comes through a love of nature and animals. The traditional family setup itself is alienating and offers no love now that his father has left home after discovering Billy's mother in flagrante delicto with his Uncle Mick,¹⁸⁸ a 'home' where his mum stays away nights to visit lovers.¹⁸⁹ Even the everyday world he inhabits is divided into *us* who (like Billy) live on the Valley Estate and *them* who live with their Bentley motor cars on Firs Hill¹⁹⁰ and of course the police call on Billy whenever 'owt goes wrong on t'estate'.¹⁹¹ The latter elicits a response from Billy who is trying to 'go straight' which may well be of interest to criminologists when he comments, 'I feel like going out an' doin' summat just to spite 'em sometimes.'¹⁹²

Less accessible are the more subtle divisions within Billy's world such as the difference referred to between his dislike of organised sport and being thought of in that area as somewhat lacking as opposed to his very real athletic abilities which he employs to pursue his hobby or to entertain his peers. When the System which abuses him organises sport Billy

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*; p.64

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*; p.33

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*; p.159

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*; p.38

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*; p.16

¹⁹¹ *ibid*; p.84

¹⁹² *ibid*

rejects it and the author mocks both it and the buffoon in charge of Physical Education, Mr. Sugden.¹⁹³

Favourably highlighted by the author is Billy's own highly individual sport of falconry which only Mr. Farthing appreciates and encourages, although interestingly the farmer, who owns the land where Kes' nest is, also empathises with Billy and points him in the direction of 'books' to find out how to train a hawk.¹⁹⁴ Billy describes the farmer as someone who 'protects' the wild life.¹⁹⁵

Thus a reader is presented with a farmer in touch with the land, an alienated teenage boy and an empathic school teacher who comprise *us* and the formality of a failing educational system which seeks to serve *them* by getting Billy Casper and others like him to conform and to know their place.

The whole of the System as portrayed in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, with its Employment Officers clutching tick-charts and teachers who carry canes, is alien to the freedom and pride in self which Billy finds through his interaction with nature and especially with his kestrel, a pride which the astute Mr. Farthing identifies also in the kestrel and which the author links with the independence that Billy aspires to:

'I think it's a kind of pride, and as you say independence. It's like an awareness, a satisfaction with its own beauty and prowess. It seems to look you straight in the eye and say "Who the hell are you anyway?" [...] it just seems to be proud to be itself.'¹⁹⁶

He could be talking about Billy who also looks the world in the eye and says 'Who the hell are you anyway?' And that 'kind of pride' displayed by Kes is a pride which Billy himself

¹⁹³ *ibid*; pp.93-95

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*; p.31

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*; p.36

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*; p.119

recalls of a time before his father left home. In a scene where Billy breaks into the now derelict and dark cinema he recalls the times with his dad having ice cream 'warm between his dad and another man' and the 'audience murmuring, Billy in the audience, looking around at them all, proud.'¹⁹⁷

The novel *A Kestrel for a Knave*, as opposed to the other three books discussed in this chapter, does not see *conventional* sport as a way out. Billy's kestrel is destroyed in an eye-for-an-eye retaliation by Jud and after Billy buries it he 'went in, and went to bed' the final words of the novel.¹⁹⁸ Presumably 'to bed' to awake the next morning to face the empty larder, the teachers armed with canes, the police knocking on his door and the eternal bullying which is part of the 'solution' offered by *them*, all over again. It is not even worthwhile the author reiterating his point because the observation that after losing his whole world Billy Casper 'went in, and went to bed' denotes clearly all that there is for Billy and working-class kids like him; if the reader does not 'get it' by now then there is nothing further to be said.

A Kestrel for a Knave is certainly a novel about alienation and loss; Billy loses both his Dad and his hawk, seemingly the only two things he has ever loved. It is certainly a critical commentary on the educational-system with its rote-learning and ever-present threats of violence. Possibly it is even a commentary on how the System forces families into conflict because no one in Billy's family is happy and no one apparently cares for one another, although peculiarly Billy himself attacks the school bully MacDowall because he slanders Billy's family.¹⁹⁹ If Billy has an aspiration beyond his determination not to work in the pit it is revealed in a poignant 'tall story' wherein he lives with a family who cares for him and where dad returns with his 'cas' and where he eats proper food like 'chips beans for awur tea' and

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*; p.159

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.80

'fish and chips for awur super'²⁰⁰ but that, with bitter irony, is written as an exercise at school where he has to write something 'that's too far-fetched to be true'.²⁰¹ The reality is thieving food to survive, avoiding bullies as best he can and stealing books from the bookshops because he is not able to use the library.²⁰²

Casper hates with passion and loves in the awareness that the object of his love will probably be snatched away at any minute; and he is right to do so for that is all that experience has taught him. How clearly does a situation depicting *them* and *us* have to be painted?

Sport, be it central and organised or a means of self-discovery, is a way out of the System which oppresses, as too is self-education. The difficulties in negotiating the space between are highlighted, the difficulty of that much-discussed entity, social mobility. There is a *them* and there is an *us*, and each is identifiable; it is however in this instance the *us* who have the ability to become *them* but who find the journey either difficult in the extreme or one which is not worth the travelling.

Police figure peripherally, the Church not at all, nor do the media. The *them* and *us* of these novels lies in 'class' structures.

²⁰⁰ *ibid*; p.73

²⁰¹ *ibid*; p.72

²⁰² *ibid*; p.34

Chapter five

MPs

Chris Mullin, the author of *A Very British Coup*,²⁰³ was the Labour MP for Sunderland South from 1987 to 2010. He graduated from Hull University and this establishment later presented him with an honorary doctorate in law; he worked as a television presenter, editor of *Tribune*, diarist and newspaper contributor.²⁰⁴

A Very British Coup was first published in 1982; the date is important with regard to political events taking place within the Labour Party at that time and which shall be discussed later. The novel raises the question as to whether a legitimately elected Government of the people can be justifiably overthrown by others over-and-above the voting populace; in effect by that political elite who are generally referred to as the Establishment, or as *them*.

Ellen Wilkinson the author of *Clash*,²⁰⁵ was the Labour MP for Jarrow from 1935 to her death in 1947. All that I have read about Wilkinson²⁰⁶ informs that she came from a working-class background being the only child of a textile-worker and a dressmaker; however her father, who supported the Conservative party, quickly graduated from his job as a textile-worker to becoming an insurance-agent and throughout his life he was a Methodist preacher. It seems clear that the family aspirations were towards higher things and Ellen was encouraged to study and won a scholarship to read history at Manchester University, something which at that time would have not been even considered as an option for most working-class women.

Wilkinson's novel *Clash* was first published in 1929 and is the story of someone who is allegedly a working-class woman (Joan Craig) being written by an MP who was undoubtedly

²⁰³ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010)

²⁰⁴ Chris Mullin, *online blog*: <http://www.chrismullinexmp.com/home> (accessed January 4th 2015)

²⁰⁵ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010)

²⁰⁶ Laura Beers, 'Feminism and Sexuality in Ellen Wilkinson's Fiction' in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 64 (2) Oxford University Press – (April 1st 2011)

born into the working-class. The heroine's language and some of her thinking however may well grate with a modern reader; for example the heroine refers on more than one occasion to looking like a 'golliwog' and to 'the nigger in the woodpile',²⁰⁷ however, this was not, at the time, considered unusual. Other phraseology from this working-class protagonist, however, seems more questionable in terms of the language of 'class' which brings to mind what Orwell referred to as 'pretentious diction';²⁰⁸ our heroine is a working-class woman who constantly refers to herself as 'one'²⁰⁹ and who describes the General Strike as 'jolly'²¹⁰ and who sees even the opposition, the '*them*' if you like, as being 'awfully decent'.²¹¹ The novel's working-class heroine, with only basic education who was born in a 'slum',²¹² can not only quote Milton's words but can arrange his words to elicit a phrase which illuminates her personal views on love and the morality or otherwise of relationships with a married man: "I can't go into retirement and just love him (Tony) – Milton's idea you know - 'Him for God only, me for God in him'".²¹³

However, the novel does deal with a unique aspect of *them* and *us*; the differences which existed (and indeed, arguably, still exist) between men and women and their role in society; what would now be recognised as the 'feminist' perspective which will be explored in depth in chapter six.

A Very British Coup is a book which perhaps should be read for its philosophical questioning of the political status quo and its examination of the ultimate *them* and *us* situation than for its literary qualities. *Them* in Mullin's novel are clearly identified as big business, the media, the USA, and the established hierarchy including the King (presumably, given the time

²⁰⁷ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.60 & p.133

²⁰⁸ George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language' in George Orwell, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Volume '4' In Front of your Nose* (London: Penguin, 1971), p.160

²⁰⁹ *ibid*; p.108

²¹⁰ *ibid*; p.125

²¹¹ *ibid*; p.179

²¹² *ibid*; p.19

²¹³ *ibid*; p.141

indication; King Charles the third) and *us* being the ordinary voters of the UK who choose democratically to live in a country free from nuclear weapons. The 'hero' is Harry Perkins who rises through the ranks of the Labour Party to become the Prime Minister. This Perkins' Socialist Government then introduces radical 'reforms' but the reforms centre on unilateral nuclear disarmament in the UK and the novel conjectures as to whether or not the USA and the British Establishment would allow such a thing to happen.

Perhaps a worthy place to start with an exploration of this unique novel is by referring at some length to an article written by the author in *The Guardian* in 2006 where Mullin states the following:

[When the novel was conceived in 1980] there was a real possibility that, come the election, the Labour party would be led by Tony Benn. The rightwing press was working itself into a frenzy at the prospect. "No longer if, but when," screamed a Daily Mail headline over a full page picture of Mr. Benn. To cap it all, the news that the US was planning to install cruise missiles in its British bases had given the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament a new lease of life.²¹⁴

The first thing to note is that the core of the novel is based on an intellectual debate concerning a *real* political possibility because in 1981 Tony Benn, a left-leaning politician in the British Labour Party, stood against the 'moderate' Dennis Healey for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party and lost by less than 1% of the vote.²¹⁵ It is undoubtedly true that had Benn won this election then the Labour Party would have swung to the 'left' under his influence and the possibility of putting into action some of the policies pursued by the fictional PM Harry Perkins in Mullin's novel would perhaps have become closer to reality. Mullin was presenting a novel for political debate and it was to be a 'what if' novel set in the UK somewhere in the near future.

²¹⁴ Chris Mullin, *The Guardian Newspaper* March 7th 2006

²¹⁵ Michael Foot, *Labour Leader's speech, Brighton 1981*
<http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=187> (accessed February 16th 2015)

There is little difficulty within *A Very British Coup* in identifying *them* and *us*. According to Mullin's perspective *them* are clearly the Establishment who, right from the opening paragraph, are portrayed as forming some kind of like-minded clique who meet in the very exclusive Athenaeum Club.²¹⁶ This establishment exists in reality and members have to be elected; until quite recently it was an exclusively male domain. In Mullin's novel the Establishment are gathered at this élite club to hear the news that Harry Perkins is to be Britain's New Prime Minister and those gathered include Arthur Furnival (a retired banker), the Bishop of Bath and Wells, George Fison (owner of a newspaper chain), Sir Peregrine Craddock (the Director of DI5) and various other people who may well come under the universal umbrella of the Establishment.²¹⁷ The reader is left in no doubt that all of these persons view the election of Perkins as both shocking and undesirable:

"Man's a Communist," exploded Sir Arthur Furnival... "a mistake..."

"Bloody better be," grunted Fison

"My God," ventured the Bishop.²¹⁸

The author is clearly more empathic towards *us* as represented by the vast majority of Harry Perkins' democratically elected Labour Cabinet who are intent on making the declared wishes of the electorate become reality. This despite the unelected Establishment which opposes them at every turn; an Establishment which includes the media, the USA, the civil service, MI5 and MI6 with the odd Bishop and the ruling monarch hovering in the background giving a nod of approval.

²¹⁶ Athenaeum Club: <http://www.theathenaeum.org.uk/> (accessed March 17th 2015)

²¹⁷ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010), pp.7-8

²¹⁸ *ibid*; p.7

*Clash*²¹⁹ is a novel seeming not to know whether it is a novel with a feminist perspective, a cataloguing of historical events during the 1926 miners' strike/lockout, a love-story, a debate about 'class' or an untidy amalgam of all of these. It certainly touches on feminism, class and love-affairs and it is certainly set at the time of the miners' strike/lockout, but whether it clearly identifies a *them* and an *us* is initially debatable. It could be argued that the single most consistent central focus of the novel is the class-struggle in the shape of the stance taken by various socialites and working-class trade unionists with regard to the strike/lockout. Wilkinson reflects the notion that 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class-struggles'²²⁰ and thus places the class-struggle at the centre of her novel. However, the apparent ease with which Joan Craig slots into the lives and traits of the Bloomsbury set to the point where she has no qualms whatsoever at being waited on by 'servants' may well give a reader pause²²¹ and it is worth pointing out that passages where Joan is relaxing, dining and conversing with the upper middle-class occur almost four times as frequently as those where our heroine is conversing or mixing with working people. This, despite Joannou and Haywood's assertion in their introduction, when referring to Wilkinson, that, 'As a feminist and socialist, Wilkinson was particularly drawn to the experiences of these (working-class) women.'²²² Of course it is essential also to add that the author's reflections may simply mirror the nature of the Labour Party at the time; a party whose members included Sir Stafford Cripps who even when alone always dressed for dinner²²³ and Sir Oswald Mosley who was of course a baronet educated at Winchester and at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010)

²²⁰ S. K. Padover (Ed. and Translator), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto,' in K. Marx, *On Revolution*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971), p.81

²²¹ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.115 & p.166

²²² *ibid*; p.xii

²²³ Ashley Jackson, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen: A Grand Tour of the British Empire at its Height* (London: Quercus Editions Ltd., 2009), p.73

²²⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica online: <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Sir-Oswald-Mosley-6th-Baronet> (accessed January 14th 2015)

Superficial differences which identify *them* and *us* are highlighted frequently within Wilkinson's novel, for example Royd, the working-class executive member of the Union is described as 'more at home anytime with his tools than with his pen.'²²⁵ Royd is delivering a report-back on the first meeting between the Government, the TUC and some of the Miners' representatives at Downing Street to a group of comrades and he states, '*our* big three went at it with *theirs* for two solid hours'²²⁶ (my italics), indicating a *them/us* division but perhaps one which is unsurprising during such negotiations. However, the language used throughout the novel suggests that this is not just another strike, it is concerning the notion of a General Strike which might even provoke a revolution; indeed certain revolutionaries and/or historians have stated clearly that the only desirable outcome to a General Strike is revolution:

If arms are not resorted to, it is impossible to organise a general-strike; if the general-strike is renounced, there can be no thought of serious struggle.

...and also:

The general-strike is one of the most acute forms of class warfare. It is only one step from the general-strike to armed insurrection.²²⁷

And within *Clash* the language used by the heroine is 'revolutionary' in many aspects although treated with perhaps a touch of levity: 'the strike is ON and it is the government who have declared war',²²⁸ announces Joan Craig and with that announcement she and another member of their TUC/miner affiliated group 'began to hammer out *The Red Flag* on a piano'²²⁹ (author's italics), There are then clear divisions between the Government and the

²²⁵ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.3

²²⁶ *ibid*; p.61

²²⁷ Stan Crooke, 'General Strike, Britain 1926: The revolution that might have been' in *Workers Liberty* 25th January 2011) <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/01/25/general-strike-britain-1926-revolution-might-have-been> (accessed July 3rd 2013), p.3

²²⁸ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.60

²²⁹ *ibid*; p.60

employers (*them*) and the TUC and the miners (*us*) and there is even talk of 'war'. Could there be a greater divide?

The evidence of the text indicates a 'clash' that could so easily have become war and the author is not creating this possibility entirely for dramatic effect, she is, more often than not, simply presenting factual elements of the strike/lockout as when she reports the words of the 'moderate' railwaymen's leader (Jimmie Thomas) when he is addressing Ramsay MacDonald (The Labour Party Leader) and Herbert Smith (the miner's leader) among others at a meeting:

We have striven for peace. We have begged for peace, because we want peace. The nation wants peace [...] Those who want war must take the responsibility.²³⁰

However, Wilkinson's narrator indicates a response from the audience which is most telling; 'Cheer after cheer was given. "If they want it they shall have it," was yelled from every part of the hall.'²³¹ One presumes that by 'it' they mean 'war'. It is evident that such scenarios were common-place and that talk of a civil war was discussed by both the establishment and left wing radicals in the real situation;²³² something simply reflected by Wilkinson and not expanded upon.

Clearly many people at the time did see the possibility that the miners' lockout/strike and the subsequent call for a General Strike could lead to civil war and revolution and perhaps the author merely reflects that possibility also. Certainly the reader will find throughout the novel references which mirror this notion. Joan herself feels:

²³⁰ *ibid*; p.28

²³¹ *ibid*

²³² Jack Conrad, 'The Weekly Worker: 80 years since the general strike - From world war to councils of action'. (2006) <http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/623/80-years-since-the-general-strike-from-world-war-t/> (accessed November 11th 2014)

They wanted inequality. They could not conceive of a society without someone to bow before and others to cringe to them. The Socialist ideal of a commonwealth of equals [...] made no appeal to the class that governed England in 1926.²³³

This is a very forceful criticism of *them* which indicates a total contempt for someone of a different 'class' and presents *them* as ignorant and fawning to even 'higher' individuals.

There is another observation a few lines on when Dacre, a middle-class writer, asks a question most pertinent to this thesis: 'Am I Socialist *'us'* or Bloomsbury *'them'*?²³⁴ (my italics) It seems that the field begins broadly and then narrows at this point in the novel; *'them'*, initially, are the Government and the mine-owners but little by little the author reduces the scope as to who the real opposition are by suggesting it is simply a class-division, even perhaps as narrow as Bloomsbury versus the workers. However; even though Dacre's question lies at the heart of this thesis with his clear observation that even to him there is a *them* and an *us*, his Bloomsbury/Socialist division seems simplistic. It seems also that it is the author herself who is wrestling with this particular division on a personal level and perhaps it is not too harsh to suggest that Wilkinson does that to some extent to justify the luxury which the heroine clearly enjoys when she is in the presence of this Bloomsbury-set. This 'division' would also have been a problem which the author, in her long journey from the working-class to the dizzy heights of political power, must surely have grappled with. That she had the unique opportunity to see both sides of this struggle is clear; Wilkinson was a speaker for the General Council during the General Strike and addressed meetings the length and breadth of the country broadcasting her findings in pamphlets and reports.²³⁵ She also however had a luxurious apartment in Bloomsbury (36 Great James Street)²³⁶ similar in

²³³ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.30

²³⁴ *ibid*; p.32

²³⁵ R. W. Postgate, J. F. Horrabin and Ellen Wilkinson, *A Worker's History of the Great Strike* (London: The Plebs League, 1927)

²³⁶ Ellen Wilkinson: Labour Party Archive; set of personal scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings; Bodleian Library.(personal access; June11th 2015)

many ways to Mary Maud's 'jewel box' of a home with its attendant 'soothing beauty'.²³⁷

Dacre's question is however one which bears scrutiny, one which raises a paradox of perhaps insoluble proportions. Joan's immediate response to Dacre's dilemma however is quite simple; 'I don't know. You haven't told me',²³⁸ indicating that for herself at least 'Bloomsbury' or 'Socialist' is simply a matter of 'choice'; i.e. you *choose* to sit with one 'class' or the other, with *them* or with *us* with the suggestion always present that for certain individuals each option is available at a given time.

The debate within *Clash* as to the role of the middle-class or the lower middle-class/bourgeoisie in the revolution seems to be an intellectual exercise indulged in by what some might unhappily label as the chattering classes; for in the end Wilkinson's novel tails off into an almost banal (in comparison with the mighty theme of class-struggle and revolution) 'who-shall-I-choose' love-story or a debate about whether women should or should not have a job. In Wilkinson's novel, revolution, as promised by some elements of the community, would seem to be more probable than the election of a radical government bent on progressive evolution as portrayed sixty years later by Mullin. However, it seems likely that both authors, while clearly sympathetic in their own way to the working-class, are strongly influenced by middle-class contacts and Wilkinson's central character becomes middle-class almost by a process of osmosis.

However, some surprising (and historically correct) divisions are dramatised within Wilkinson's novel, including the revelation that the machine-men of the *Daily Mail* refused to print an article which was critical of those who supported the miners.²³⁹ The media, one might think, are generally part of *them*; however, those who recall the days when typesetting of news-print was done laboriously by hand under the labour-intensive 'hot metal' linotype

²³⁷ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.21

²³⁸ *ibid*; p.32

²³⁹ *ibid*; p.62

process²⁴⁰ will perhaps also recall the strength at the time of the print unions, so again, perhaps not a division at all and also an interesting pointer to the inconsistency of the *them/us* division as history progresses. At the time of Wilkinson's writing the owners of the *Daily Mail* were as supportive of the establishment as they are today; however, the difference between then and now is that the method of production in 1939 allowed the print unions to exercise a power which they simply no longer possess. There was certainly an awareness of the power of the media as indicated by the fact that the active workers created their own newspapers but it is doubtful that they were aware of the real power of the press in the same way that Mullin was sixty years later. For Mullin the media are powerful and actively reflect the views of *them*.

Mullin portrays the media as universally opposed to egalitarian progress and as being tools of the ruling-class. Consistently throughout *A Very British Coup* only negative words with regard to the media are presented and in his very first speech on election night Perkins defines an important point with regard to 'power':

All we have won tonight is political power [...] that is not enough [...] Real power in this country resides not in Parliament, but in the boardrooms of the City of London; in the darkest recesses of Whitehall bureaucracy and in the editorial offices of our national newspapers.²⁴¹

Just how right he turns out to be is revealed when the will of the people is crushed by the unelected forces which he has indicated. Even the USA has more control over the British Press than Perkins' government, as illustrated when the CIA Director informs the US President, '[...] we can start the fightback right now, since most of the British press is in friendly hands.'²⁴² Sir George Fison, perhaps a thinly disguised parody of Rupert Murdoch or

²⁴⁰ Howard Cox & Simon Mowatt, *Revolutions from Grub Street: A History of Magazine Publishing in Britain* (Oxford: University Press, 2014), p.26

²⁴¹ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010), p.10

²⁴² *ibid*; p.25

Robert Maxwell, employs all the divide-and-rule tactics he can in order to destabilise and discredit the Government. The narrator informs us that 'Fisons newspapers even ran a 'Scrounger of the Week' competition, urging people to spy upon unemployed neighbours'.²⁴³ Individually named newspapers post outrageous headlines allegedly reflecting the beliefs of the people; the *Sun*: 'Go Back to Moscow', the *Express*: 'LABOUR VOTES FOR SUICIDE' and 'even the *Daily Mirror*' expresses concerns about the elected government.²⁴⁴ Throughout the novel there are clear signs that the media controls or distorts circumstances in a manner which seems designed deliberately to influence the way the elected government is perceived by the rank-and-file.

Towards the conclusion of Mullin's novel the narrator informs us that as the government becomes intent on progressing with nuclear disarmament, 'Press coverage grew steadily more outrageous'.²⁴⁵ The television media seems also to be clearly biased and not averse to a little 'manipulation' of the evidence and it is stated that:

[...] both BBC and ITN did find time to show the [pro Perkins] demonstration leaving Hyde Park. They used near identical clips in both of which a Communist Party banner stood out clearly.²⁴⁶

Interestingly George Fison's media use insinuations of Communist links to discredit Perkins' government in an article described earlier in the novel:

By way of evidence [that candidates were Communist backed] they [Fison's newspapers] offered an article in the *Morning Star* or a platform shared with a Labour MP and a member of the Communist Party.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ *ibid*; p.42

²⁴⁴ *ibid*; p.44

²⁴⁵ *ibid*; p.169

²⁴⁶ *ibid*; p.183

²⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.45

When the time is ripe to deal a fatal blow to Perkins' government, Sir Peregrine Craddock, who is listed in *Who's Who* as being 'attached to the Ministry of Defence' but who is in fact 'Director General of DI5',²⁴⁸ directly asks George Fison to spread a lie about the PM, "I was wondering," said Sir Peregrine, "if you could get your chaps to run a little speculation on the PM's health."²⁴⁹ Fison obliges; 'By the time the newspapers began carrying a spate of reports about his (Perkins) health, it no longer seemed like a media conspiracy'.²⁵⁰

The novel ends with the Prime Minister being forced, by pressure and blackmail, to resign his position and it is of no surprise that the final words of the novel are given over to Sir Peregrine Craddock at a 'small dinner party' organised by Fisons at which the editor of *The Times* is present as are various high-ranking Civil servants and 'a rising star in the BBC'. In a manner which would bring painful memories to every activist of the left they compare their victory over Perkins' democratically elected Government to the victory over Salvador Allende: "Been nothing quite like it since the night Allende was overthrown in Chile", Alford was saying.' and then in response to a toast to him, proposed by Fison Peregrine Craddock replies; 'Everyone should feel proud [...] It was a very British coup.'²⁵¹

So for Mullin at least the media and the USA combined with the forces of MI6 and Civil servants, the very people whom Perkins had warned about on his election night, constitute the *them* which *us* should be wary of.

Wilkinson, in *Clash*, is much less inclined to create a situation where the media are seen as direct enemies of progress. The media are held in suspicion but it is with an altogether more lenient, some might say naive, eye that Wilkinson nods in their direction believing, as her heroine does, that public meetings are as important a way of disseminating information as

²⁴⁸ *ibid*; p.8

²⁴⁹ *ibid*; p.206

²⁵⁰ *ibid*; p.208

²⁵¹ *ibid*; p.218

the media. She may well have been right in the sense that:

There would be no letters (during a General Strike), the telegraph wires would be jammed even though the post office men were not called out. No newspapers.²⁵²

Although the heroine is not entirely naïve as to how astute the media can be she needs a firm reminder from Beryl Graye, ‘a notorious suffragette and now a Labour candidate for Parliament’,²⁵³ who reminds her:

“My dear, don’t you know yet that if you go into your bedroom, lock the door, wrap your head in a blanket, and murmur a secret about the Labour Movement, it will be in the *Daily Express* next morning?”²⁵⁴

It is factually correct that during the General Strike two newspapers worked in opposition, with each struggling to be identified as the one telling ‘the truth’ although many smaller publications were also distributed.²⁵⁵ The narrator of *Clash* speaks of the practical difficulties of information-distribution in the form of news-print to Glasgow and Newcastle and for further distribution then by volunteer-driven motor-cars to homes, activists and union members throughout the country. The newspapers identified in the novel are the *British Gazette* edited by Winston Churchill and the *British Worker* produced and distributed by the ‘general council’.²⁵⁶ The importance of having a newspaper which would present the point of view of *us* as opposed to *them* is recognised. However, the importance seems vague and not as central or significant as it would be to Mullin sixty years after the General Strike. This is illustrated in an exchange between Joan and Gerry:

“You spoke of new plans in your letter.”

²⁵² Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.70

²⁵³ *ibid*; p.70

²⁵⁴ *ibid*; p.71

²⁵⁵ British Library online; ‘Checklist of General Strike Newspapers of 1926’
<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/news/strike/> (accessed January 27th 2015)

²⁵⁶ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.73

“My dear, I’m all plans, always was. Well, I’m going to put the whole five thousand into a Labour weekly paper.”

“As good and quick a way of losing it as any other.” remarked Joan.²⁵⁷

And although Gerry’s newspaper comes into fruition under the uninspiring name of the *Wednesday Weekly* it is staffed by rather middle-class revolutionaries: ‘In this editorial group [...] Harry Browne and Joan were the only genuine proletarians.’²⁵⁸ The central importance of the media is not fully recognised in *Clash*, perhaps because at the time it simply was not as important as it is in Mullin’s time, and as if to emphasise this one of their star reporters, Parma de Pratz, has as a first assignment for this alleged new newspaper of the left: ‘a Society wedding [...] a peer and stage affair’.²⁵⁹

So for Mullin, writing in the 1980’s about a fictionalised account of an election which is to take place in the future, the media is central. The media in *A Very British Coup*, in all its forms conspires to overthrow the democratically elected Government. A reader can be in no doubt that the media are clearly in the opposition camp, are clearly identifiable in the political sphere as being *them*, while another active Labour MP, Ellen Wilkinson, writing half a century earlier, does *not* present the media as being quite so clearly and actively in opposition to *us* or as working directly for *them*. It should be remembered however that most daily and weekly newspapers of the time printed columns of society births-and-deaths together with penny-dreadful type lurid stories about crime²⁶⁰ and that, further, during a General Strike the usual newspapers would simply not be printed.

To return to the theme of Harry Perkins’ victory speech in *A Very British Coup*, it is worth

²⁵⁷ *ibid*; p.158

²⁵⁸ *ibid*; p.181

²⁵⁹ *ibid*; p.182

²⁶⁰ Saylor Foundation (*The*)

<http://www.saylor.org/site/textbooks/Understanding%20Media%20and%20Culture.pdf>
(accessed December 29th 2014), p.53

quoting a section where a group of establishment figures who will later be identified as *them* are watching Perkins' speech on television:

Perkins paused and then, speaking slowly and looking directly into a television camera, straight into the eyes of Sir Arthur Furnival, he said, "Our ruling class have never been up for re-election before, but I hereby serve notice on behalf of the people of Great Britain that their time has come." ²⁶¹

This speech is effectively a declaration of war. Perkins is stating clearly that he is aware that certain people in society, no matter who is/are 'elected by the people', have always held the reins of power. His message is clear; these people themselves, specifically this 'class' of people, are now to be sought-out and are to have their credentials examined by his newly elected government. The reaction among those at the exclusive Athenaeum club is both darkly-comic and explicit:

Perkins' words burst upon the Athenaeum as though the end of the world was at hand. Which, in a manner of speaking, it was.

"South of France for me, old boy," said Furnival.

"Certainly looks like the game's up, Arthur," murmured the Bishop, whose faith in divine providence had temporarily deserted him. ²⁶²

Fred Thompson, a working-class character in *A Very British Coup* who becomes Perkins' press secretary, recognises the importance of 'class' and makes a startlingly accurate observation: 'I wouldn't be surprised if our ruling class don't team up with the Americans to help destabilise us.'²⁶³ Thompson's unlikely consort, the wealthy Chelsea-girl Lady Elizabeth Fain, ponders on the 'meaning' of class as she drives through the country: 'a clump of forest

²⁶¹ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010), p.11

²⁶² *ibid*; p.11

²⁶³ *ibid*; p.21

parted to reveal a country house not unlike the one in which her parents lived.' She thinks about how different it all is in Battersea:

Some people in Battersea even looked different from those she mixed with. The women were pale, pasty, often with unwashed straggly hair and tired eyes. Girls her own age were weighed down with children and shopping baskets and push chairs. Was that what being working-class meant? Would she have been like that if she had been born on a council estate in Battersea?²⁶⁴

Perhaps the reader is tempted to answer her question, and the answer would, one suspects, be dependent on which 'class' the reader belongs to. Elizabeth Fain falls into a trap which many have failed to negotiate and that is the simple recognition that the sense of belonging to a 'class' is not always a matter of birth, of heritage, or even lifestyle/income; it is as likely to be an attitude of mind linked with political beliefs.

'Class' is not a specific central concern for Mullin; it is implied as an issue. The contrast throughout is between Perkins himself, an ex-steel-worker, and the others in the field of conflict; the media barons, the bankers, the Knights of the realm, the civil servants. When 'class' is referred to directly it is with a touch of irony as when the 'traitor' Reg Smith who leads the United Power Workers' Union is recalled in memory by activists thus:

Those with memories long enough recall the day when Reg Smith was at the sharp end of the class struggle. There was even a time when he would not have taken offence at being described as a Marxist.²⁶⁵

Thus the 'class struggle' is at least acknowledged and the insinuation is that by seeking power in the manner which Smith does, by effectively siding with *them*, he has deserted his class, he has deserted *us*.

²⁶⁴ *ibid*; p.69

²⁶⁵ *ibid*; p.124

But 'class' and a woman's position in society is certainly a central theme in *Clash*. As the reader is being introduced to the main characters Mary Maud emerges as a wealthy bachelor socialite who is 'an intimate of an exclusive Bloomsbury circle'²⁶⁶ and, should the reader doubt that this novel is based on fact, an 'Explanatory Note' informs us that the Bloomsbury circle are 'A group of writers, artists and intellectuals which include Roger Frye, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, Leonora Carrington and Virginia Woolf'.²⁶⁷ Maud is described as a person 'Utterly without a sense of class',²⁶⁸ however this observation is slightly undermined when she informs Joan, 'We get all hot and bothered if we hear one growl from the outside world that is keeping us in comfort. We know less about Monmouth than we do about Mars'.²⁶⁹ And although she professes to be 'all in with you' she does then admit, 'shyly' that 'I get half my money from coal, did you know?'²⁷⁰

I would ask that the reader keep in mind an earlier observation that Wilkinson herself perhaps became middle-class by osmosis; an invisible process which changes perspectives and which unconsciously alters attitudes. This is perhaps reflected in the central character in *Clash*, Joan Craig, a working-class woman, deeply involved in left-of-centre politics who is mixing with the Bloomsbury circle and who certainly seems to spend her life exclaiming how 'jolly' the coming revolution is while touring around the country in expensive cars and taxis and eating at every opportunity an amazingly diverse menu of exotic and delicious food often served up in the homes of socialites by their 'skivvies'.²⁷¹ One cannot help but speculate as to the general life of an MP (as Wilkinson was when she wrote the novel) and how different that life is to that of (say) a munitions worker in the war years (which her heroine Joan was). Perhaps the difference, the struggle between two different worlds is reflected in Joan Craig's

²⁶⁶ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.9

²⁶⁷ *ibid*; p.191

²⁶⁸ *ibid*; p.9

²⁶⁹ *ibid*; p.13

²⁷⁰ *ibid*

²⁷¹ *ibid*; p.44, p.46 & p.53

thoughts as she is summoned to leave the mining village of Carey's Main to return to London to address a fund-raising meeting following a 'musical in some fashionable West End rooms'.²⁷² Initially she reacts against the proposal but then allows her thoughts to reflect on how 'lovely' it would be back in London in her friend's large house with the servant, Suzanne, in attendance:

[...] sitting by the fire, eating one of Suzanne's perfectly cooked meals, and to hear all the gossip. And after supper – a long luxurious smoke, snuggling in the cushions, wrapped in the soft beauty of the charming room.²⁷³

The reader can almost feel the subconscious attraction, the gradual spontaneous movement of working-class 'molecules' through a partially permeable membrane into a region of middle-class values. Osmosis. Class-osmosis. *us* becoming *them*.

It is also interesting to note that in Lewis Jones' *Cwmardy* Len and Mary, the central characters, strictly working-class activists, organise education in the shape of the 'Circle' including discussions of philosophy, music, birth control and sexually transmitted diseases²⁷⁴ and that their actions are deemed laudable and the meetings well attended. In *Clash* the central (working-class) heroine Joan observes fleetingly and with a note of dismissal if not contempt, 'The inevitable mild middle-class lady (giving) out leaflets on birth control',²⁷⁵ a comment perhaps reflecting John Carey's observations relating to the tendency of intellectuals at the time to embrace eugenics.²⁷⁶

Although *Clash* and *Cwmardy-and-We Live* are novels dealing with a very similar period in history the writing style of Jones is blunt and the political message seems to lie at the core,

²⁷² *ibid*; p.164

²⁷³ *ibid*; p.166

²⁷⁴ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Library of Wales: Parthian, 2010), p.309

²⁷⁵ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.15

²⁷⁶ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses; Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993)

while for Wilkinson the writing of a love-story with several political and social strands seems to take centre stage. Tony Shaw²⁷⁷ draws attention, *en passant*, to something worth expanding upon here, that later in *Clash* Wilkinson's heroine is directly involved with working-women and discovers that what they want to know most is 'how to stop having any more babies while we're all so poor' (Mrs. Greenhalgh, a miner's wife is speaking);²⁷⁸ and this same Mrs. Greenhalgh admonishes a suggestion attributed to 'Mrs. Armitage'²⁷⁹ that miners and their wives should practise 'self-control' with this retort:

Does your class practise that? Your class who can get any advice they pay for [...] Your class keep us women in ignorance and then you treat us as though we've committed a crime when we have another baby that you won't tell us how to prevent.²⁸⁰

The division here lies in varying levels and degrees of education; however, the central focus of Mrs. Greenhalgh's anger is clearly class-based, class which divides the individuals who are allegedly on the same side during the strike/lockout along *them* and *us* lines. In this case *them* who know about birth control and *us* who do not. Wilkinson herself was closely associated with the Workers Birth Control Group whose stated aim was to educate with regard to birth control and also to provide free contraception for working families;²⁸¹

No such 'minor' divisions are observed in *A Very British Coup*. For Mullin the conflict lies between the elected individuals who are asked by the people of the UK to rule the country for a given period and the powers behind the throne who actually run the country regardless as to who is 'elected'. 'Religion', or at least those in the hierarchy of religion, are visible,

²⁷⁷ Tony Shaw, 'British Working Class Fiction and Lionel Britton's Place in it', <http://tonyshaw3.blogspot.co.uk/2008/11/working-class-fiction-and-lionel.html> (accessed September 18th 2013)

²⁷⁸ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.152

²⁷⁹ This name appears to be a typing error as there is no other reference to a Mrs. Armitage and the working-class miners' wife replies to this individual as Mrs. Armfield.

²⁸⁰ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.153

²⁸¹ Pamela M. Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics, 1918-1939* (Cambridge UP, 1994)

however no active role is assigned to them. The Bishop of Bath and Wells appears on page one at the *Athenaeum Club*, and with the exception of one single comment he makes to Furnival, the retired banker, that 'The game's up',²⁸² he is a peripheral, almost invisible character. He disappears from centre-stage to reappear right at the end of the novel (again at the Athenaeum Club) at a time when the 'very British coup' by the establishment is complete. The author informs us that he is 'looking years younger'.²⁸³ This is presumably due to the relief felt at the successful overthrow of a democratically elected Government which *them* did not approve of, by what is effectively an act of treason. For Mullin *us* constitute the people who believe in democracy while *them* are those who use democracy up to the point where it does not suit them; then it is 'amended'.

For Wilkinson religion is also a peripheral concern. Joan Craig is exhausted by personal problems relating to her own love-life and thrown into turmoil by the fact that her lover's wife has agreed they can live together discreetly and that her lover (Tony) is pleased with this, but adds the proviso that such a thing is only possible if Joan gives up work. At this our heroine resorts to prayer; '[she] found herself praying [...] to a God she had almost forgotten since her childhood'.²⁸⁴ However, the notion is not dwelt-upon by the author and religion is only ever mentioned again once in the novel and then with reference to birth-control and the Catholic attitude to it.²⁸⁵

So both MPs apparently have little concern for the place of religion in society and each simply mentions it in passing with perhaps a slightly contemptuous smile being noticeable on the lips of Mullin as he unequivocally places the hierarchy of the established Church alongside those who apparently treat democracy with contempt.

²⁸² Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010), p.11

²⁸³ *ibid*; p.217

²⁸⁴ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.114

²⁸⁵ *ibid*; p.153

Similarly both novelists/Labour MPs appear to have no huge concerns with the immediate cataloguing of anything to do with the police or the armed forces. Wilkinson describes police and strikers playing football together²⁸⁶ and earlier she describes a policeman assisting Mary Maud to find her way through a crowd.²⁸⁷ Mullin comments, almost as an aside, upon police having shot dead five petrol bombers by acknowledging graffiti which reads, 'Avenge the Railton Five' then adds a note that the Railton Five were 'five West Indian youths killed in Railton road when police opened fire on a crowd of petrol bombers.'²⁸⁸ Lady Elisabeth and her working-class lover Fred each have a class-biased view of the police evidenced when she describes them as 'kind and courteous'²⁸⁹ while Fred feels they are 'corrupt and violent.'²⁹⁰ When the Establishment asks Inspector Page to burgle the Prime Minister's flat, although the act is distasteful, he would do it 'because he was under orders'.²⁹¹ This is in keeping with Mullin's cynicism with regard to anything to do with authority but comes nowhere near the vivid descriptions of police brutality as detailed by Plunkett, for example in *Strumpet City*²⁹² or Kelman in *How Late it was How Late*.²⁹³

With regard to our central theme it would not be doing justice to Ms. Wilkinson if the feminist aspect of her novel was not discussed, for the place of women in society is not merely a male/female division it has also a class-division in the sense that different classes in society reveal differing attitudes to gender. Feminism is introduced into Wilkinson's novel in various strands which weave together to give the reader pause for thought. Wilkinson raises acute and pertinent questions of sexuality, morality, equality, the nature of marriage and employment of women in a manner which even today, nearly ninety years after the General Strike, are as active and provocative as they were then.

²⁸⁶ *ibid*; p.81

²⁸⁷ *ibid*; p.47

²⁸⁸ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010), p.40

²⁸⁹ *ibid*; p.68

²⁹⁰ *ibid* p.40

²⁹¹ *ibid*; p.199

²⁹² James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.400

²⁹³ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London: Minerva, 1995), p.6

In order that the reader will not feel that I am being over critical of either the author of *Clash* or her working-class heroine I should state that I am very aware that Politics (with a capital 'P') is increasingly an intellectual occupation involving highly educated and often well-off people and that this observation holds true for most British political parties including the central characters in *Clash's* Labour Party. Political parties may seem at first glance to be created by class-divisions and Hilliard states; 'The membership of the CPGB was overwhelmingly working-class throughout the interwar period.'²⁹⁴ Furthermore, no less an individual than Ralph Milliband stated at the time that the Labour Party was simply a 'safety valve' which acted as a tool of the ruling-class with its 'management of discontent'.²⁹⁵ In other words even the Labour Party were part of the opposition which constitutes *them*. The point is that if the reader senses an implied criticism in what follows then perhaps my words should be read with both the historical perspectives referred to in mind.

So Joan Craig is a young idealist firebrand from the working-class and the novel itself has been widely discussed in terms of its autobiographical nature.²⁹⁶ The author began her political career as a founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and when the Labour Party disaffiliated the CPGB by not allowing joint membership she resigned from the CPGB. She was deeply involved in the organisation of the Jarrow Hunger March and she went on to become a radical Labour MP who played a large part in ensuring the 1944 Education Act came into power. Importantly she was also very active during the 1926 General Strike which is the period the novel covers.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents; The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Harvard College, 2006), p.132

²⁹⁵ T. Forester, *The Labour Party and the Working Class* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p.66

²⁹⁶ Laura Beers, 'Feminism and Sexuality in Ellen Wilkinson's Fiction' in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 64 (2) Oxford University Press – (April 1st 2011) (throughout)

²⁹⁷ John Simkin, 'Ellen Wilkinson' in *Spartacus Educational*
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/TUwilkinson.htm> (accessed September 11th 2013)

There are then many parallels between Wilkinson and the heroine of *Clash* and it seems highly plausible to presume that the author drew upon her own experience when writing the novel. Although that does not mean that the voice of the heroine is the voice of the author there are no concrete examples within the novel of the narrator's voice interjecting to criticise the central figure nor even to mock or chide the heroine. It is safe to assume that when the heroine ventures into unknown territory where she finds herself working with the Bloomsbury-set and other middle-class individuals the situations would surely have been very similar to those encountered by Wilkinson herself when she began her political career. Thus when Joan realises for the first time that middle-class women appear to have more freedom than working-class women it is a learning curve which probably mirrors that same curve taken by the author in 'real' life. This is reflected when Joan implores Tony Dacre to stop his middle-class wife from assisting 'blacklegs' and he replies:

'How can I? We're not in the Stone Age, and I'm not a cave man. My wife earns her own income and lives her own life'

When Joan sticks out 'her determined little chin' to assert that such a thing is not her idea of married life Dacre replies 'quietly':

'You have preached equality and organised for it. Why should you grumble at the results when they don't turn out quite as you like?'²⁹⁸

The reader surely recognises that Joan's world, up until she became involved in politics, would have been the same as the author's, or vice-versa.

Just a few pages further on in the novel Joan is at a mass-meeting of workers and strikers and she observes:

²⁹⁸ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.25

The middle-class was completely absent [...] They [the people present] were her own. She knew their lives [...] There were very few women present.²⁹⁹

Apparently the middle and upper-middle-class women are most certainly more liberated than working-class women; they make their own decisions and participate with apparent equal status to the men. This was surely a realisation which must have come as something of a shock to the author herself as she migrated from her working-class roots to her position of power.

As observed however, Joan is not the author. Nonetheless the learning curves are the same and they reflect yet another instance of *them* and *us* which is problematic and which relates to the broader notion of feminism and egalitarianism.

The attitudes reflected and discussed in *Clash* form part-and-parcel of the love-story in the plot. Tony Dacre, for all his dedication both to the cause and to Joan is not only middle-class he is also a man whose views reflect social norms and attitudes of the period. Joan has to consider these middle-class views and attitudes and examine them as one would new ideas; not accepting them totally perhaps but weighing and evaluating them. A modern reader may well become exasperated at her 'patience' as when the lovers discuss their future together. Tony Dacre worries about his wife being 'deprived of the protection of my name' should they divorce³⁰⁰ and offers Joan the opportunity to become his mistress; 'We could have a lovely nest together and no one need know.'³⁰¹ Then he asks Joan; 'Do you love me enough to give up your work?'³⁰² When Joan indicates that she is disinclined to do this Tony's response is emphatic: 'I've tried sharing a wife with her job and it doesn't work.'³⁰³ Tony's response to Joan's direct question as to whether *he* is prepared to give up *his* work is still familiar to most

²⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.27

³⁰⁰ *ibid*; p.110

³⁰¹ *ibid*

³⁰² *ibid*

³⁰³ *ibid*

modern readers as he responds, 'Of course not. We must eat, silly' as also is his assertion that, 'Loving your mate and bearing his children and bringing them up is a whole time job.'³⁰⁴ Although Joan's immediate response is a mocking; 'Kirk, *kinder*, and kitchen'³⁰⁵ it is clear that the learning curve is in process and that the author herself is drawing upon the process of self-debate with regard to her own role as a working-woman. The new environment, both in reality and fiction, produces dilemmas and contradictions; on the one hand the women of the middle-classes are possessed of wealth and independence but the men still see women as homemakers and themselves as bread-winners. This huge dilemma, which was certainly presented to the author as her real life progressed, is 'discussed' in the novel via the central characters, especially Joan Craig.

Perspectives however are not static, they are constantly changing in many ways; as the novel(s) progress the concepts change, perspectives become less (or more) clear, and readers are viewing all that is taking place on this word-stage from a point in time, history therefore is ever-present as a factor. Each of us seeks to cement our knowledge and interpretation of both the text and our personal experience to attempt to construct what Iser referred to as a 'virtual dimension',³⁰⁶ however, this 'virtual dimension' is a creative activity on the part of the reader and is unique, private and personal.

Later the thoughts, the education processes if you like, become clarified when Joan is again with her 'own kind', working women who are also running homes. A realisation dawns upon Joan that the very act of revolution, the involvement of women in the strike, produces a 'solution' at least for her class:

As Joan talked to influential women among the miners – the wives of the county

³⁰⁴ *ibid*; p.111

³⁰⁵ *ibid*

³⁰⁶ Wolfgang Iser, 'The Implied Reader' in *Wolfgang Iser The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), pp.274-294

councillors, the officials of the Women's Co-operative Guild, women guardians, the committee of the Labour Women's Sections, she was struck by the power these women wielded.³⁰⁷

And she muses upon what she might like to say to Tony:

'You say I can't be your wife and lover and do my job. Look at the work these women do' [...] She laughed to herself, imagining Tony's face.³⁰⁸

How these working-class women 'manage' their dual roles is also made clear when Joan 'apologises' for adding to their workload and Councillor Mary Cocks replies:

[...] now my man's idle he can turn the mangle and wash the floors. So long as I don't ask him to do anything the neighbours can see him doing, like windows or steps, he's very handy.³⁰⁹

All of this introspection and reexamination of knowledge gleaned from being the privileged observer of both classes is mirrored in the author's own experience and the reader can surely recognise a dilemma presented in Joan's final thoughts on the subject as she departs this meeting with her 'own kind':

'It would do us all good to have to face these women's problems for a bit; my hat, wouldn't there be a revolution quick!'³¹⁰

Wilkinson's overall perspective also seems in keeping with Jameson's notion that:

[...] a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and

³⁰⁷ *ibid*; p.148

³⁰⁸ *ibid*; p.148

³⁰⁹ *ibid*; p.149

³¹⁰ *ibid*; p.149

disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant value system.³¹¹
(author's italics)

It is of interest to note that in Mullin's novel the only 'legitimation' of the treason committed by the ruling-class is contained in an assertion by the very real right-wing observer and editor Sir Peregrine Worsthorne which precedes the novel; 'I could easily imagine myself being tempted into a treasonable disposition under a Labour Government dominated by the Marxist Left'³¹² and in the final conclusion by the fictional Peregrine Craddock that what has taken place is 'a very British coup.'³¹³

No debates or discussions relating to either divisions between the middle-class and the working-class or differences of opinion with regard to 'a-woman's-place' occur in *A Very British Coup*. It could be that they have no place in such a novel or perhaps these 'problems' are believed to be 'solved' or non-existent when Mullin is writing. Mullin's vision of *them* and *us* is quite black and white and the author appears to believe that they (*them*) will win simply because they have might on their side. In that sense Mullin has written a more one-dimensional novel than Wilkinson. Mullin raises a single question for consideration which is this: 'If the British people elect a radical government would the 'powers-that-be' allow that same government to put into effect radical changes?' and the answer according to Mullin's novel is an equally simple; 'No!' Of course (as with Wilkinson) this is a novel; presumably Mullin would not continue as an MP if he really believed that. What he is doing is raising a debate akin perhaps to Lenin's infamous question; 'What is to be done?'³¹⁴ Or he is offering a warning to the Labour movement as to their limitations.

Let no reader forget that the actions of the establishment, of *them*, as outlined in *Mullin's*

³¹¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell UP, 1981), p.41

³¹² Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010), p.5

³¹³ *ibid*; p.218

³¹⁴ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966)

novel do indeed constitute treason although the commentator in the novel observes that such treasonable thoughts:

[...] were to be heard in the officers' mess at the Army Staff College at Camberley [...] in the boardrooms of some of Britain's grandest Corporations [...] even, on occasion, to be heard between the four walls of a permanent secretary's office in Whitehall.³¹⁵

It would seem prudent however to keep in mind Harrington's astutely observed commentary on the nature and reality of treason:

Treason doth never prosper: what's the reason?
Why, if it prosper, none dare call it treason.³¹⁶

While Wilkinson's novel is set firmly in a specific period in time and refers to many characters who are historically 'real' (Churchill, Baldwin, MacDonald, Herbert Smith etc.), Mullin's novel is set in a fictional future and although reference is made to 'real' events (Windscale Nuclear accident, Three Mile Island and the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile etc.) the central characters are fictional. Any discerning reader however, as suggested earlier, may well deduce that some of these fictional characters appear to be based on actual people; caricatures perhaps.

However, the ways of seeing and interpreting in a political sense are very different and are presented to the reader by both novelists as 'novels of ideas'; each trying at some level to involve the reader in what the authors perceive to be necessary debates. For Mullin it is almost simplistic, he asks whether democracy actually works or are there people in society (*them*) who will surmount democracy and commit treason with apparent equanimity? People perhaps like the *Sunday Telegraph* columnist Peregrine Worsthorpe whose quote has recently been referred to.

³¹⁵ Chris Mullin, *A Very British Coup* (London: Profile Books Ltd: Serpent's Tail, 2010), p.165

³¹⁶ Sir John Harrington 1561–1612 *Epigrams*, Book iv, Epistle 5.

While Mullin sets his novel centrally in the halls of political power for Wilkinson, writing sixty years earlier, life is more diverse; she raises questions about marriage, love, feminism, class, sexual morality and work, setting her novel in elegant mansions and to a lesser extent in the workplace.

Wilkinson identifies several instances of *them* and *us*; the divisions between male and female (social, intellectual and political), the class-divisions which form attitudes and frame character, notions of egalitarianism and to a much lesser extent than Mullin the idea of democracy as being 'under threat'. In *Clash* however the 'threat' stems from the working-class and the possibility of revolution accompanying a General Strike, whilst for Mullin the threat stems from a perceived non-acceptance of the democratic-will of the people by certain powerful individuals and institutions.

The debates which are entered into by Wilkinson, the dilemmas of several of her fictional characters especially the heroine Joan Craig, are still relevant today. Especially the debates as to the way males and females aligned to various class strata apparently see the world in different ways and the imbalance as to the way they are perceived by society. The central heroine's character indicates also that the author herself is not in possession of all the answers; this is, for the author, a 'real-time' debate. For example Joan is frequently given pause for thought as when her lover states quite categorically that her idea that they could live off her wage as a union rep or even as an MP is 'silly',³¹⁷ and his continued analysis in the same discussion has him observing that

[...] when women were more or less amateurs, when the surprise *was not that they did a job well, but that they could do it at all*; but now they want more.³¹⁸ (my italics)

³¹⁷ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.111

³¹⁸ *ibid*; p.111

Though he qualifies this latter observation with 'it is right that they should'³¹⁹ it is somewhat surprising that Joan acknowledges this without apparently a trace of irony as 'his insight' which she is 'pleased at'.³²⁰ The author, it appears, is in the same place as her novel's heroine in that she is processing and internally debating while throwing the greater question open for discussion; should men be the sole bread-winner and if so, then why?

There is however a paradox with regard to these two novelists. They are not like any of the other writers discussed herein and the differences are important. Both Wilkinson and Mullin are active and professional political animals, both are not only members of the Labour Party at the time of their writing but both are identified as being to the 'left' of their party and each is paid a salary much higher than that of the ordinary working-man or woman. Wilkinson and Mullin are professional career-politicians with a political axe to grind; a perceptive reader may well surmise that they have an 'agenda'. Central to both is a division which is clear and it is almost so obvious that it can easily be overlooked; and that is the very salient point that in both novels the real enemy is Capitalism and/or business interests; what is now commonly referred to as the Establishment or the System.

This notion of Capital or Business being fundamental in the class-war is of course central to left-wing politics. It is central to the theories expounded by Marx and Engels and it is something which is also central in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, which was written some thirty to forty years prior to Wilkinson's *Clash* and eighty years prior to Mullin's *A Very British Coup*. Indeed within *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* it is thought necessary by the author that the important political point, that Capital and Business are fundamental in the class-war, be explained in simple language by that novel's hero, Owen, who organises a 'lecture' to explain what he calls 'The Great Money Trick';³²¹ this lecture 'educates' both

³¹⁹ *ibid*

³²⁰ *ibid*

³²¹ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), pp.225-9

Owen's fellow-workers and the reader. At that time of writing Tressell felt it necessary to explain in detail why money, as manipulated by business, was the core political-problem. It is central also to both Wilkinson and Mullin; however, while it is to the fore in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and is something which needs laborious 'explanation' by the central character, it is something which is simply 'understood' in the career politicians' novels.

At no point does Mullin feel it necessary to 'explain' to the reader anything about the motives of this small group of business men and their allies, for their motives are implicit; their comfort, their wealth, their power is under threat and so they fight back against a perceived enemy. It is *them* reacting to *us*.

Wilkinson is writing more than fifty years before Mullin and twenty odd years after Tressell. She is writing about contemporary events thus her novel is set at a time in history where the two great political forces have at last 'squared up' and declared war. On the one hand are the workers and on the other hand big business. Each side has its allies; the workers have their Unions, many sections of the middle-classes, some politicians and some of the intellectual members of society while big business have the media, their personal wealth and perhaps most importantly; the Government with its attendant armed forces and police. The central stage on which the action takes place is the period known now as The General Strike, a 'strike' which the author was deeply involved in politically. While feminism, egalitarianism, love and marriage are among the themes discussed and presented for debate, the backdrop, the setting, is that General strike; the *Clash* of the giants emphasised in the title of Wilkinson's novel.

Historians and commentators refer to this moment in history as the period of The General

Strike which is perhaps indicative of the power of the media and of those who write history; the dispute of course began with demands from employers for wage-cuts which when they were opposed prompted the employers to 'lock-out' the miners. The strike was called by the Trades Union Council but the strike stemmed from the attempts by big business in the shape of the coal-owners to starve the men into accepting pay-cuts by locking them out.³²²

It is as well to remember always that 'history is written by the victors',³²³ by *them*, almost everyone today speaks of the 1926 General Strike, few however speak of the 1926 lock-out.

There is a certain coming together of strange bedfellows in Wilkinson's *Clash*. As has been discussed, the characters whose opinions are most frequently voiced in her novel are those of the Bloomsbury-set; writers, artists, theatre-going intellectuals, 'rich revolutionaries'³²⁴ and even one of the share-holders of the coal-mines which are the ultimate prize to be won.³²⁵ These people join with the workers who are involved in the Trades Union Congress led General Strike. They state their reasons for aligning with the workers foremost as being humanitarian as opposed to political. Among these is Helen Dacre, a socialite with independent wealth who also supports the OMS³²⁶ who were looked upon by the strikers as 'blacklegs'.³²⁷ There is also Mary Maud who while supportive of Joan and the strikers is also a coal-shareholder. Helen's attitude, though complex, apparently makes perfect sense to her and she explains it to Mary Maud thus:

³²² Michael Tracey, *General Strike* (University of Colorado: Microform Academic Publishers, 2003), p.7

³²³ Various attributed to such diverse individuals as Foucault and Churchill.

³²⁴ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.68

³²⁵ *ibid*; p.13

³²⁶ *Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies*; the people who took over the 'essential' tasks of driving trams, delivering newspapers etc.

³²⁷ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.24

Don't let's quarrel you and I. We aren't fighting the miners really, you know that. But the bigger issue has to be settled. The Government must win, of course, and then you and I will do something for the miners' children.³²⁸

It is of interest to note that Helen Dacre identifies two very salient points; that her side are not 'fighting the miners really' and that the 'bigger issue' centres on 'The Government' (representing the coal-owners, or *them*) versus the *TUC* (representing the working-class, or *us*), and for Helen 'The Government must win'. This is exactly what Mullin is discussing in *A Very British Coup*, the difference being that Wilkinson is dealing with historical fact, albeit 'fact' which is written into history by the victors, while Mullin presents us not only with a fictional futuristic conundrum but also the stated belief that those who oppose the will of the people are the enemy. Further, with Mullin, the real opponents of democracy are the ruling-class and these are identified as the enemy, as *them*.

Each author is addressing and highlighting a similar *opposition*, albeit with different concerns. The *them* are still the same, as presumably are the *us*, but the difference is the historical perspective and the fact that Mullin is merely raising perhaps little more than an intellectual exercise similar to those he undoubtedly took part in within the safe realms of his school debating-society.

One has to wonder too how 'radical' Wilkinson's text is when the central character, the heroine of *Clash*, Joan, appears exceptionally at home with the upper middle-class set in Bloomsbury, happily being waited on by Mary Maud's 'skivvy' Suzanne³²⁹ and managing to avoid lunch at the common 'local Lyons' and instead to plump for 'the Español Restaurant in Soho and have omelettes and sherry.'³³⁰ At least part of the attraction of London to her is the

³²⁸ *ibid*; p.68

³²⁹ *ibid*; p.115

³³⁰ *ibid*; p.19

luxury and not for Joan the queuing for buses as our heroine 'adore(s) the very smell of taxis'.³³¹

Pamela Fox comments that Wilkinson's text

[...] idolises the mindset of the rank and file [and] marvels at their inherent wisdom; though often kept to the margins of the narrative, they function here as symbolic bearers of true class consciousness.³³²

Fox says also that:

From the start, she (Joan) detects the simplistic, formulaic base of their (the workers) "higher" consciousness.³³³

There does appear to be something quite contradictory in this observation, for if Joan is a simple working-class woman herself, albeit one who has organised strikes and who is now a Trades Union official, then surely the 'detection' of traits in her own kind would always have been there, would be inherent, not something which dawns upon her as Fox's word 'detects' suggests. It is as if Fox is suggesting that Joan is representative of something 'other', something or someone who is examining both the Bloomsbury-set and the strikers as if they were things of which she held no experience. One other observation from Fox is perhaps also pertinent at this point; Fox draws attention to the fact that Joan may appear sympathetic to the left but in fact is putting forward very centralist Labour Party rhetoric, as when she responds to a prominent member of the London group who is working for the *Wednesday Weekly* who sees fit to praise the rhetoric of the Communist leader Tom Openshaw:

³³¹ *ibid*; p.173

³³² Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p.86

³³³ *ibid*; p.139

It's easy enough to be logical if you don't worry how far ahead of your followers you go, or even whether you have any followers.³³⁴

The *them* and *us* as presented by these politicians of the 'left', set fifty three years apart expose a major change in historical perspective. The forces of the State hinder the progress of democracy for Wilkinson and are present also throughout Mullin's book, both novels concern the struggle between the *them* who hold the power and the *us* whom they oppress. However; half a century before Mullin was writing, the 'struggle', as portrayed by Wilkinson, seems like almost a game and each side has its heroes and villains and each side will recognise the ultimate will of the people, as Joan may well have put it perhaps; it's all jolly good fun. Mullin's novel is more sinister, ultimately it questions the very democracy which is the basis of law, order and our human-rights.

Perhaps the most interesting them/us division is the division between the sexes and certainly for Wilkinson there is a clearly feminist debate which contemplates the 'slavery' of marriage and the role of women-as-equals to the point of being the bread-winners in a partnership. The discussions between Wilkinson's heroine and her two 'men-friends' and the internal debate and her thought-process as she ponders upon whom to choose as a partner, are provocative, even today. Something however is lost in the debate when it is clouded by the constant realisation that Joan is a very privileged woman who, while being 'of' the working-class, is surrounded by luxury and culture and who herself wields more power than most men.

Perhaps it is necessary to look elsewhere in order to uncover further attitudes towards the *them* and *us* of feminism and where better to start than with Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and her

³³⁴ Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2010), p.182

novel *This Slavery*³³⁵ which will form part of our ongoing investigation in the following chapter.

³³⁵ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011)

Chapter six

Gender

What I intend to explore in this chapter is the way women are represented in some working-class novels of the early twentieth century. I shall do this by examining the portrayal of women by someone who is both a woman and a member of the working-class; Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, and another individual who is a man and a member of the middle-class; Saunders Lewis. Lewis' novel *Monica*³³⁶ will also, I believe, raise questions as to how 'class' is identified both in the present day and at the time these novels were written. Both novels express strong opinions often spoken directly by an opinionated narrator.

The difficulty of identifying 'class', one which constantly rises throughout this thesis, is evident in Saunders Lewis' novel which is set between the wars in an unnamed fictional suburb of Swansea wherein lives a group of individuals described, somewhat unfairly, by Rowlands as being, 'a society without roots, without history, without God'.³³⁷ *Monica* elaborately defines class-divisions in a way that seems alien to us now. The author's voice, described by Gray as the voice of the 'unobtrusive narrator'³³⁸ but here somewhat obtrusive, intervenes directly to inform the reader of the following:

Now a road in a middle-class suburb is something unique. Its character is formed and its social life completely run by women[...] It is the women who determine all personal contacts between the houses; they who, by bestowing or withholding their 'good-mornings' and 'good afternoons', decide each family's social standing.³³⁹

The last phrase is telling as it indicates layers or divisions within the classes, something

³³⁶ Saunders Lewis, *Monica* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997)

³³⁷ John Rowlands, 'Nofelau Saunders Lewis' in J. E. Williams (Ed.), *Carwyn Ysgrifau Beirniadol* (Wales: Dinbych, 1970), p.5

³³⁸ Monica Gray, 'Madness and the Welsh Novel: a Reading of Saunders Lewis' *Monica*' in *Harvard Celtic Colloquium Vol12* (Harvard University: Dept. of Celtic Languages, 1992), p.89

³³⁹ Saunders Lewis, *Monica* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997), p.37

which Ethel Carnie Holdsworth in *This Slavery*³⁴⁰ also recognises and describes as akin to a caste system. Indeed one of Holdsworth's heroes, Stiner, recognises

[...] the rigid caste dividing the shop girls from mill hands, bank clerks from weavers and spinners. All exploited yet with an illusion of being different.³⁴¹

In *Monica* this may be a 'road in a middle-class suburb' but each individual, according to the narrator, perceives their own class-based or perception-based 'place' in the hierarchical structure which determines not only how women identify their society but also the social differences between females and males. Lewis' novel describes a neighbourhood in which 'status is granted to or withheld from each female member of the family according to a husbands' wages and spoken dialect'.³⁴² This raises a pertinent question; are women portrayed as 'different' to men in terms of the way they perceive 'class'? Also, there is a need to examine whether gender differences generate an identifiable and significant *them* and *us* situation.

However, before proceeding with an examination of *Monica* there is a need to establish the novel's credentials as a working-class novel in terms of the definition established in chapter two and to give a brief outline of the 'plot'.

There is a problem which needs be addressed because there may be some who would doubt that this is strictly a working-class novel. However; although the central characters are often identified by the author/narrator as 'middle-class' the truth is that the central character, Monica, is a small shop-keeper's daughter, she is raised in a 'rather shabby shop in Cardiff'³⁴³ and she eventually marries a man who works in a shop for a wage. Monica is

³⁴⁰ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011)

³⁴¹ *ibid*; p.25

³⁴² Monica Gray, 'Madness and the Welsh Novel: a Reading of Saunders Lewis' *Monica*' in *Harvard Celtic Colloquium* Vol12 (Harvard University: Dept. of Celtic Languages, 1992), p.89

³⁴³ Saunders Lewis, *Monica* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997), p.10

described as 'common'³⁴⁴ and 'uncouth'³⁴⁵ and although she lives in a small semi-detached house and has aspirations to being a socialite, she is basically a housewife and probably what would be labelled today as someone aspiring to emerge *from* the working-class. Monica has little awareness of class-culture and nothing that she does betrays any hint that she appreciates or is concerned with cultural ideas. This contrasts sharply with the undoubtedly working-class sisters in *This Slavery*, Hester and Rachel, and indeed with most of the working-class activists therein who are all deeply involved in education,³⁴⁶ literature,³⁴⁷ poetry³⁴⁸ and classical music.³⁴⁹ The title refers to a dualistic slavery, that which involves class and that which involves gender; both elements, the 'hands' who work manually and the women who are seen as possessions, are also perceived as 'property' within the system.

Monica tells her life's 'story' to Alice, an elderly woman who employs maids and is clearly affluent. To Alice it sounds like a story which Monica 'rehearsed a hundred times in her loneliness'³⁵⁰ and which the narrator refers to as 'a mixture of the true and the false'.³⁵¹ Monica's story is passionate; she describes her younger sister Hannah as being favoured by her parents and tells of her jealousy and how her 'jealousy grew into hatred'³⁵² and perhaps it is this hatred which drives her to destroy the relationship Hannah has with her fiancé. Monica, after spending her days looking after her bed-ridden mother, walks the streets for hours each night watching men and feeling in her heart 'intense yearning'.³⁵³ Sometimes she is mistaken for a prostitute but she is 'terrified of prostitutes and their clients'³⁵⁴ and the commentator adds 'It never occurred to her that she was one of them.'³⁵⁵ This is a peculiar comment, one we shall return to when resonances of a similar theme, that marriage is a

³⁴⁴ *ibid*; p.7

³⁴⁵ *ibid*; p.8

³⁴⁶ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.8

³⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.124

³⁴⁸ *ibid*; p.83

³⁴⁹ *ibid*; p.5

³⁵⁰ Saunders Lewis, *Monica* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997), p.10

³⁵¹ *ibid*; p.10

³⁵² *ibid*; p.11

³⁵³ *ibid*; p.12

³⁵⁴ *ibid*; p.13

³⁵⁵ *ibid*

form of prostitution, surface in *This Slavery*.

The psychology of marriage and how married couples relate to each other forms a recurring theme throughout *Monica* and to some extent this is something common to all people of all classes portrayed therein. However, there is something about the character of Monica herself that makes the reader almost ashamed to view her; she seems naked in her forthright manner as when kissing her sister's fiancé passionately under the mistletoe³⁵⁶ and the revelations of her dreams are mildly shocking even in the twenty first century.³⁵⁷

A magnet which drew me to include this novel in this thesis and to contrast it with *This Slavery*, is the irony which stems from a gradual awareness that any *them* which dwell 'out there' are in fact ('within' Monica at least but perhaps in all people) actually an *us*, because this peculiarly isolated woman is the epitome of a contradiction which lies within this entire thesis; the increasing awareness that each individual chooses, to some extent, the structure, the position, the actuality of any *them* or *us* that they so perceive.

With Monica there is an added dimension to this in that she eventually recognises something about her attitude to prostitutes and their clients when she pensively recalls:

[...] the idols of her youth, Cleopatra and Pompadour; what had they been if not whores? Perhaps the horror she felt of street-women was nothing but a fear of looking too closely at her own ideal.³⁵⁸

This leads her to speculate that 'Perhaps that's what I am too.'³⁵⁹

Princesses or shop-girls, each is perhaps what they aspire to and not that which they are

³⁵⁶ *ibid*; p.25

³⁵⁷ *ibid*; p.47

³⁵⁸ *ibid*; p.89

³⁵⁹ *ibid*

born to, and certainly Monica has something about her true self which is shocking, even to a modern reader. Monica deliberately seduces her younger sister's fiancé, perhaps driven by jealousy but it seems more that she does it simply because she realises that she can. She is also obsessed with cats, giving the reader a nod towards her possible ability to cast spells like a witch with her 'familiar', and she is also a total fantasist who seems (again there is a catlike suggestion) to toy with her prey as when she confesses to her husband, 'For me you were a plaything. I never loved you honestly. It was Hannah who loved you. But I couldn't leave you alone.'³⁶⁰

I find the reading of this account of love and desire at least as 'honest' as the divisions and complexities of love and desire portrayed by Holdsworth when the same question arises in the love-triangle formed by Jack Baines, Rachel Martin and her sister Hester. When Hester chooses to marry Sanderson the mill-owner for money and to also (literally) save her own life³⁶¹ only to realise later that this transference is one which takes her 'from sordid slavery to refined slavery',³⁶² the situation is presented as a complex moral question of life or death. On the one hand Lewis portrays the heroine as concerned only with 'self' and her desires whilst Holdsworth presents a heroine fighting for her class but similarly concerned with her own 'self' in terms of the preservation of her life. In both novels the actions taken by the central characters are taken with the knowledge that they act as they do because of their gender. I do need to point out that Klaus appears to have misunderstood Hester's motives with regard to this marriage when he states that, 'Hester's path [...] turns out to be another abortive attempt of a working girl to raise herself above her class.'³⁶³ This interpretation ignores the central theme of Holdsworth's novel that 'marriage' is a form of 'slavery' for women because their real choices are limited by the fact that they are considered vastly less important than

³⁶⁰ *ibid*; p.73

³⁶¹ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.99

³⁶² *ibid*; p.183

³⁶³ Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), 'Silhouettes of Revolution: Some Neglected Novels of the Early 1920's' in *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.95

men.

So is *Monica* a working-class novel? At one level it is a novel 'about' how people come to terms with who they are and where they are positioned in terms of class and so it is useful to us in that it enters into the debate conducted in chapter two relating to the difficulties involved in identifying 'class'. It is a novel concerned with the broader spectrum of class rather than one which is concerned with the working-class alone. The central characters have humble origins; each works for a wage or adopts a traditional role of 'housewife' or 'breadwinner'. The problems which they have to confront include problems which are common to most people; however, the trace-roots of Monica and the other central characters are firmly in the working-class and thus their perspectives are fashioned by working-class conditions of worth.

Perhaps the most revealing voice within *Monica* is the voice of the author/narrator. It is as if Lewis is puzzling over the actions of the heroine he has created and is also involved in allowing his disapproval to show. For example the narrator opines:

[Monica] was terrified of prostitutes and their clients. She knew the spots in the city where they congregated and she kept away from them. It never occurred to her that she was one of them.³⁶⁴

Then a few lines further on the narrator again intervenes:

Those whose lives are spent in perverse sexual fantasies often appear much younger than their years. On her twenty-sixth birthday Monica looked like a girl of twenty.³⁶⁵

This is more than the author setting a scene, Lewis' narrator is actively condemning his

³⁶⁴ Saunders Lewis, *Monica* (Bridgend: Seren, 1997), p.13

³⁶⁵ *ibid*; p.13

heroine's actions in walking the streets alone at night and is also passing a judgement as to the 'perverse' nature of her 'fantasies' which one would suspect are little different to the fantasies of most individual liberated women. Monica reveals these to the reader as innocent to the point of naivety when, early on in the novel, whilst on one of her walks she is 'picked up' by a man who takes her to the 'movies'. Monica has in fact been mistaken for a prostitute but as she leaves the cinema where the man has taken her and walks up the perhaps ironically named 'Cathedral Road' Monica is in 'ecstasy' and her mind is filled with thoughts of 'their future together'.³⁶⁶ It would seem her 'crime' is not that she is obsessed with 'perverse sexual fantasies' but that she is unworlly. True, she is 'shocked by her own thoughts'³⁶⁷ which ultimately concern the man her sister is engaged to, but in the early stages she is 'not guilty of scheming to betray her sister'.³⁶⁸ What she is indulging in is a romantic fantasy of being loved although it is she who turns an innocent kiss from her sister's fiancé (Bob) under the mistletoe into a passionate and lust-filled embrace,³⁶⁹ making Bob regret 'that Hannah could not kiss like that'.³⁷⁰

It is after Monica marries Bob that the small lies she indulges in, the deliberate misunderstandings and the half-truths which are innocently childish in themselves, turn into new fantasies which concern her position in the society which she and Bob now inhabit. It is a society which I have referred to earlier; Monica lives now with Bob in 'a road in a middle-class suburb'³⁷¹ where she dwells in her semi-detached house and where she is constantly judging others and their position and having her own position judged by others; as when Mrs. Hughes passes her by in the street and Monica asks why it is she has not said 'hello' to which the reply is quite blunt and offensive:

³⁶⁶ *ibid*; p.16

³⁶⁷ *ibid*; p.20

³⁶⁸ *ibid*; p.23

³⁶⁹ *ibid*; p.25

³⁷⁰ *ibid*; p.28

³⁷¹ *ibid*; p.37

'I'm surprised how you don't understand how out of the question it is for us to be friends. I had no idea that your husband was in trade.'³⁷²

Mrs. Hughes had heard from her husband that Monica's husband is indeed 'trade', 'MacEwan was only a clock-mender in a shop',³⁷³ but Mrs. Hughes is frustrated *also* because there is someone above her in the pecking-order and a reader finds her complaining that she cannot afford to dress like Mrs. Valmai Briand and yet oddly Mrs. Briand herself 'was once a mere shopgirl'.³⁷⁴ And so, like class conscious Russian-dolls, each slots into an apparently seamless, yet frantic, river-of-humanity where each individual is perceived differently by all the other individuals; a *them/us/them/us* scenario which continues perhaps *ad infinitum*. The effect of all this acutely perceived class-snobbery is to view the world falsely, to live in a world where girls from working-class backgrounds marry clock-menders and then, because they have few aspirations and little else to do in their lives, they live in a semi-fantasy world where the nuances and intricacies of being better-than, or inferior-to, the neighbours becomes in itself a *raison d'être*. Among this shallow and almost incestuous scenario the *them* and *us* are reduced to judgmental observation and inconsequential bickering.

Holdsworth appears initially to be declaring war on previous writers who have neglected a central issue when writing literature, and her declaration of war is unambiguous; 'What I feel is that literature up until now has been lop-sided, dealing with life only from the standpoint of one class.'³⁷⁵ So Holdsworth believes that most previous literature has failed to tackle issues concerning her 'class'.

Holdsworth's novel was first published 1925 and the point she makes is pertinent as she was to produce a series of radical feminist novels which certainly presented to readers the other

³⁷² *ibid*; p.40

³⁷³ *ibid*; p.41

³⁷⁴ *ibid*

³⁷⁵ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.vii

side of the class-coin. An ex-mill-worker born to parents who in their turn were mill-workers she certainly fits the criteria for a working-class novelist, indeed I tend to agree with Klaus who states that she is 'one of the very few female working class novelists of any period.'³⁷⁶

Working-class women writers are few-and-far-between simply because they would not have had either the time to laboriously write novels and nor would they, generally, have any real access to education. All that they did they did with 'one hand tied behind us',³⁷⁷ a phrase which indicates that working-class women were almost literally tied to other things; the children, the home, the everyday domestic chores. Working-class homes at the time would not necessarily respect the idea of education. The dramatist John Osborne for example observed in his autobiography that in his childhood days (early 1930's), 'books and music were almost completely disregarded [...] people who went out to work every day had no time for such luxuries.'³⁷⁸ Women were however active in politics at the time and thus political education would have been available at some level and at about the time of writing Victor Gollancz was active in establishing the Left Book Club³⁷⁹ which made literature of the left more readily available to working people. It seems patently true also that Holdsworth is more confident and certain of her political opinions than many British novelists, whatever their gender.

In *This Slavery* what comes through strongly is the voice of the narrator which it is safe to assume carries many of the author's opinions and beliefs because they reflect the political

³⁷⁶ Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), 'Silhouettes of Revolution: Some Neglected Novels of the Early 1920's' in *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.97

³⁷⁷ Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2000)

³⁷⁸ John Osborne, *A Better Class of Person* (New York: Dutton Books, 1981), p.61

³⁷⁹ Victor Gollancz, 'L/PJ/12/504, India Office Records, Asian and African Studies Reading Room, British Library, St Pancras Papers, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick - OU online', <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/left-book-club> (accessed September 21st 2015)

opinions she espoused throughout her life.³⁸⁰ The narrator's voice at one point for example even interjects to 'take over' as it were a full chapter³⁸¹ to address the 'dear reader' in a manner Brecht would have approved of. Superficially the author does this in order to explain the progress of the central characters but she also offers a view of the future where 'the People's Sun' shall rise 'Red, defiant, o're the dark'³⁸² and where those who falsely present a 'man made God' 'Cannot break the True and Strong'.³⁸³ That the narrator's voice is that of the author is a reasonable assumption to make as the history of the author shows her voicing similar opinions in essays in the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Sunday Worker*³⁸⁴ and various other journals and periodicals.³⁸⁵ It is this unapologetic narrator who informs us that Rachel finds 'the heaven-dope [...] sickening'³⁸⁶ and the ruling-class a 'dark, brigand band, gather(ing) the roses of culture, idleness and power'.³⁸⁷ This voice however is different to the sometimes sceptical and accusatory voice of (for example) the narrator in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* who portrays the working-class as self-centred, ignorant and unfeeling.³⁸⁸ Different in that for Holdsworth's heroine it seems at times to be almost 'text-book' left-wing socialism which sees the police for example cast as 'slaves chosen from slaves to keep them in their place'³⁸⁹ and which seeks to persuade the reader of the beauty of her own personal 'dream', a dream apparently shared by

Morris and Marx, Carpenter and Liebknecht, Wat Tyler and John Ball, Ernest Jones and Robert Owen, Shelley and Heine, and William Blake [...] the old imperishable

³⁸⁰ Kathleen Bell, 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth (1886–1962) Community History, Blackburn Central Library' on website *Cottontown* at <http://www.cottontown.org/Culture%20and%20Leisure/Literature/Pages/Ethel-Carnie.aspx> (accessed September 1st 2016)

³⁸¹ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.121

³⁸² *ibid*; p.121

³⁸³ *ibid*; p.122

³⁸⁴ *ibid*; p. xi

³⁸⁵ *ibid*; p.ix and i

³⁸⁶ *ibid*; p.7

³⁸⁷ *ibid*; p.13

³⁸⁸ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.7

³⁸⁹ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.24

Dream, singing itself on the lips of a feverish girl-woman, caught in the trap of Capitalism.³⁹⁰

At other times, personal anger, crying-out its argumentative and provocative voice like a bar-room debater, is evident, the king is, 'that padded effigy of a man, wire-pulled and echo-mouthed'³⁹¹ and the media, the Church and the System exist only to 'preserve this state of disorder, robbery, indirect murder, and legislative fraud'³⁹² while the capitalist world is populated by 'those who bought and sold people, starved and crushed them, and considered them less than cattle.'³⁹³

The *them* and *us* aspects of Holdsworth's novel however are not only concerned with the frequently portrayed Capital-versus-Labour debate although that thread runs strong throughout as the novel centres around 'trouble at the mills'.³⁹⁴ The problem of the police as defenders of the System is a thread which connects with this author's themes as it does with many other novelists considered herein. However, what struck me most on reading *This Slavery* was the commentary which centred on marriage, women and the simple unity of working-class families who at every turn share what they have with others in a similar plight, the sense of community which Eagleton and Pierce refer to many times.³⁹⁵ This latter construct is one which is a universal throughout the novel and is similar to the image presented throughout *The Blinder* and *Strumpet City*. No working-class individual seems unprepared to share the little which they have and it is dissimilar in many ways to the sometimes pessimistic despair of the working-class evident in Tressell's great work. I have counted no less than fifteen specific instances of unselfish acts of kindness in *This Slavery* where working-people with almost nothing still share what they have and I therefore

³⁹⁰ *ibid*; p.91

³⁹¹ *ibid*; p.46

³⁹² *ibid*

³⁹³ *ibid*; p.188

³⁹⁴ *ibid*; p.135

³⁹⁵ Mary Eagleton and David Pierce, *Attitudes to Class in the English Novel* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1979) p.132 and throughout

conclude that this is seen (by the author) as a trait that, if not entirely exclusive to *us*, is nonetheless presented in contrast to *them* who represent, or are served well by, the System.

The first act of unmitigated unity with a member of his own class directly concerns Bob Stiner who, on the day of his release from prison for being drunk, assaulting a police-officer and contempt of Court, when the wind is howling and rain is pitting his head and face, encounters a woman, a stranger to him; 'a young woman, respectfully dressed. She was in pain.'³⁹⁶ This woman asks him the way to the workhouse and it transpires she is seeking the workhouse maternity ward. Stiner recognises her condition and reacts by giving her all that he has in a symbolic act that conjures images of the Biblical story of The Widow's Mite;³⁹⁷ Stiner 'shoved a shilling into her hand awkwardly', telling her it is 'For the baby – from its grandfather – just for luck.' When she seems reluctant he adds; 'With an old chap's love – to a poor little pal.'³⁹⁸ This is almost melodramatic. However, the combination of all that the reader knows; that Stiner has been made homeless himself, that he is dedicated to the cause, that he has been 'framed' for assault by a police-officer who will later murder him and above all his unflinching support throughout the novel for his socialist beliefs, his Union and for *us*, actually makes the scene deeply moving. This arousal of empathy is enhanced by the narrative, the suggestion that this 'class' of people form a 'family'; the shilling is a gift to the unborn child 'from its grandfather'. It is at one level a simple act of charity but it is also one given without false sentiment simply because Stiner knows what it is like to be isolated and homeless.

Let me present just one other act of unity or solidarity or charity presented in Holdsworth's novel, an act of unity which this time crosses class divisions. Hester, who is married to the hated Mill-owner Sanderson, has a son, Stephen, who at age seven falls victim to diphtheria and dies. There is a strike at the time and working-people, starved and dispossessed, are

³⁹⁶ *ibid*; p.29

³⁹⁷ King James Bible; *Mark 12:42*

³⁹⁸ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.29

demonstrating for justice. And yet, when they pass the manor house where the child has just died they do so silently, stopping their protest songs. The narrator intervenes to inform the reader as to why they walked silently past the house:

They had not sung. The poor, even in their famine, and desperate despair, do not war on children. The Great Uncultured, Great Unwashed, have their own unwritten laws of chivalry [...] they were silent – though their own children were famishing.³⁹⁹

Of course this is arguably the author's propaganda, yet it is peculiarly effective in winning the reader to the argument that those who constitute *us* have decent and humane values and are able to empathise with the suffering of others, an argument amplified by the simple power of the narrator's passionate and forceful observation that 'their own children were famishing'.

However; I would think that primarily the adjective which best describes this unique novel is 'feminist', an awareness of which reveals yet another diverse instance of *them* and *us*. The 'discussion' of issues relating to marriage and the *ownership* of women by men is not one which is the central focus of many novels. Interestingly though, as has been seen, it is reflected at some level in Wilkinson's *Clash* and even in Lewis' *Monica*. It is also presented as being a literal modern-day ownership/slavery relationship between the Razor King Johnnie Stark and Ella McBride in *No Mean City*.⁴⁰⁰ Holdsworth however seizes on many opportunities to focus on a 'difference' which although it centres specifically on the women's place in society does not portray a scenario which divides men and women into *them* and *us* as a reader might expect, indeed there is no exclusively Marxist critique of marriage as being something which the bourgeois manipulate as a means of securing property and wealth.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.172

⁴⁰⁰ A. McArthur and H. Kingsley Long, *No Mean City* (London: Corgi, 1957), p.57

⁴⁰¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Chapter: II – 'Proletarians and Communists' in *The Communist Manifesto*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)

In fact the very first reference to marriage in the novel is to reveal it as a way of securing an escape from the working-class situation with its attendant poverty and hard labour:

'I think if a millionaire hopped along and looked twice at me,' said Rachel, 'I should feel inclined to marry even that social octopus. There are times when I get sick of the working-class. Sick of them.'⁴⁰²

Of course, being the heroine of the novel she does not do that, however, her equally heroic sister (Hester) does just that; she spurns the Trades Unionist' Jack Baines proposal of marriage in order to marry the local Mill owner, Sanderson. Her reasons are practical, she has been diagnosed with TB and she will die if she does not get rest and recuperation, thus in her bed at night

[...] it was the face of Sanderson which rose before her sleepless vision. He was the only straw she had to cling to. For Sanderson had ten pounds a week.⁴⁰³

Then as if to reinforce the logic and practicality of her vision the very next paragraph turns to Jack Baines and the reader witnesses his predicament:

He had five cents in his pocket. He had slept in a Mission House, having pretended to save his soul, so that his body should not be a block of ice.⁴⁰⁴

Holdsworth shows us two individuals, each in their own way dedicated to 'the cause' and each in their own way having to make concessions simply in order to survive; one sells her body to a man she does not love, the other mortgages his beliefs to gain warmth for his body. The difference which motivates Hester's choice is the difference between 'ten pounds' and 'five cents'. This is a realistic acceptance of the stark choices which often confronted women of all classes.

⁴⁰² Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.33

⁴⁰³ *ibid*; p.99

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid*; p.99

Women however are portrayed in both novels as becoming the property of men most specifically when they enter into marriage. Hester is feeding information about her husband's plans to deal with the strike to the strikers but her husband thinks that it is her sister Rachel who is 'spying'. Rachel explains the situation to Jack Baines:

'He'll murder her, Jack, if he finds out. He thinks it's me [...] He wouldn't murder me, because I'm not his wife, meaning, I'm not his property. See?'⁴⁰⁵

Married women then, are strictly 'property'. This lends an irony and perhaps even gentle humour to Rachel's question to her mother: 'I wonder when women'll be free mother?' then adds, almost as an afterthought; 'An chaps too of course.'⁴⁰⁶ Then she continues to voice her opinion that women, even those involved in progressing 'the cause' are treated differently by men, another form of 'this slavery' perhaps, though again treated with the hint of a smile: 'all that they think we're fit for down at the S.D.F. yonder, is to cook a thumping big potato pie, when there's a social.'⁴⁰⁷

At a less complex level *This Slavery* exposes simple hypocrisy in the male/female relationship. Sanderson himself is known to visit prostitutes; he is that 'same old dog' who visits 'that woman in Mary Jane Street'.⁴⁰⁸ Yet when Sanderson contemplates marrying Hester he first interrogates her about her relationship with Jack Baines to the extent where she feels like 'a victim of the Inquisition',⁴⁰⁹ and although she is evidently shocked by his persistent questioning and this disturbs Sanderson he continues because, as the narrator reveals with bitter irony, there must be 'No damaged goods for Sanderson! He had great

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid*; p.191

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid*; p.54

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid*; p.54

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid*; p.85

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid*; p.86

ideals.⁴¹⁰ Even Jack Baines cannot see that Hester turned to marriage with Sanderson as the only course of action which would save her life and in a bitter attack he labels her a prostitute.⁴¹¹ Ironically it seems that Hester's husband is annoyed that she did *not* prostitute herself to Baines when Baines is acting as a representative for the strikers who may just ruin his business. Sanderson had asked Hester to speak with him to try to persuade him to halt the strike and when she fails he complains 'You had him in your hands and let him slip through.'⁴¹² Hester, with Baines' accusation that she has prostituted herself in her marriage still uppermost, responds with; 'You would not have me make love to him?' and her husband barks the retort; 'Love? Anything!'⁴¹³

It would seem that for *them* who represent the ruling classes, women are 'other' and are foremost the possessions of men. However, let us not forget Johnnie Stark and his working-class slave(s)⁴¹⁴ or the alternative images of women present in British working class novels; for example the powerful lone woman who stands against the racist Teddy Boy gangs to protect a single black youth in *Absolute Beginners*.⁴¹⁵

Holdsworth's novel centres around the sisters Hester and Rachel and although at the beginning of the novel both are clearly ordinary working-women the culture which surrounds them in their cottage where they live with two other women is perhaps untypical. There is a bust of Beethoven on the mantel-shelf and paintings or prints of William Morris and William Liebknecht adorn the walls of their 'peaceful' kitchen.⁴¹⁶ In the novel's opening scene the two sisters and their Nan are quietly reading and repairing their clothes; the book Rachel is reading is an account of evolution.⁴¹⁷ Discussion concerns religion, the morality of marriage,

⁴¹⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹¹ *ibid*; p.138

⁴¹² *ibid*; p.143

⁴¹³ *ibid*

⁴¹⁴ A. McArthur and H. Kingsley Long, *No Mean City* (London: Corgi, 1957)

⁴¹⁵ Colin MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners* (London: Allison and Busby, 2011), p.248

⁴¹⁶ *ibid*; p.5

⁴¹⁷ *ibid*; p.6

evolution and politics. When a male friend calls, another ordinary working man (Jack Baines), Rachel notes that 'his pocket bulged with books'⁴¹⁸ and the first individual described after that opening scene is yet another working-man, Bob Stiner, who is quoting Omar Khayyam to himself as he walks down the flagstoned streets.⁴¹⁹ When Hester and Rachel are again alone in their mother's home Hester is playing a Beethoven Sonata on her violin while Rachel is reading Marx's *Das Kapital*.⁴²⁰ So these are perhaps not 'typical' working women and they do not mix with 'typical' working-men; they are literate, cultured, intelligent, politically-active, different in every way to the workers in Tressell's novel, for example, wherein Slyme the odd-job man is portrayed as a self-seeking letch⁴²¹ and where the 'cuddy' Crass's culture consists of a 'piece of card' listing 'The Art of Flatulence'.⁴²²

Holdsworth's novel presents also a forthright commentary on the police-force as part of the System, as being a very public part of any *them* perceived or identified. Although individually police may initially be human-beings like the rest of *us* it is only a matter of time before that humanity diminishes as we learn that 'His [the young police-officer] face was fresh and boyish. He had not yet been dehumanised.'⁴²³ The first time any comment is made with regard to the police is by the narrator and it is scathing, but perhaps also perceptive:

[the policeman] walked on his unholy beat, a member of the great class which exists to keep slaves in their places. When she [Hester] saw him through a mist of tears she crossed over to the other side of the road, obeying an instinct.⁴²⁴

The narrator presents the police as a separate and 'unholy' 'class' who are avoided 'instinctively' because their purpose is to keep the 'slaves' in their places; they are not part of

⁴¹⁸ *ibid*; p.8

⁴¹⁹ *ibid*; p.21

⁴²⁰ *ibid*; pp.32-3

⁴²¹ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.132 & p.267

⁴²² *ibid*; p.150

⁴²³ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.26

⁴²⁴ *ibid*; p.15

us. James Larkin in *Strumpet City* reflects this same opinion, for him the police are 'the minions of the employers instead of the servants of the citizens.'⁴²⁵ Holdsworth's narrator's descriptions of police are frequent and always negative; the police are 'slop'.⁴²⁶ Decent people like Stiner 'spat on the ground' as the police passed.⁴²⁷ The police, without exception, are brutal and Sergeant O'Neill viciously assaults Bob Stiner for 'defacing' the pavements with his slogans.⁴²⁸ They are 'of our own class' but 'can be used to shoot us down',⁴²⁹ they are labelled as one of the three exploiting classes; 'monstrosities such as O'Neill, and that priest, and old Barstocks'⁴³⁰ (who represent the police, the Church and Capitalism/The Law – 'old Barstock' is both a mill-owner and a magistrate) and of course O'Neill goes on to murder Stiner and to blame the murder on another innocent working-man.⁴³¹ Sanderson, the mill owner and Hester's husband at the time, informs the representative of the striking workers that, 'We've the police on our side, and if there's any trouble, they'll rush up a section of the militia',⁴³² and when 'scabs' are brought in to break the strike it is the police who 'protect them',⁴³³ and it is the police who are there 'helping Capital to break a little skirmish of Labours'.⁴³⁴

There is no counter argument in Holdsworth's novel, her narrator portrays *every* police-officer as evil or potentially evil and *every* member of the working-class to a man and to a woman knows this. The police are presented as the defenders of *them*. It is presented as fact.

It is also as well to remember that in other novels explored herein the police are seldom

⁴²⁵ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.150

⁴²⁶ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.21

⁴²⁷ *ibid*; p.21

⁴²⁸ *ibid*; p.23

⁴²⁹ *ibid*; p.109

⁴³⁰ *ibid*; p.111

⁴³¹ *ibid*; p.195

⁴³² *ibid*; p.156

⁴³³ *ibid*; p.160

⁴³⁴ *ibid*; p.178

looked upon with any form of favour or indeed understanding.

Perhaps women however constitute a different kind of 'other', perhaps in the ever-changing world where individuals are constantly subject to being defined in terms of their 'class' women belong in an underclass, a perspective we shall now look to and expand upon.

Chapter seven

The underclass

Patrick Macgill's *Children of the Dead End*⁴³⁵ which was published in 1914 has the highest claim to be a working-class novel amongst the novels I intend to discuss in this section, although the term 'novel' has to be redefined perhaps. Mitchell for example states that this is a 'new type of novel [...] the term fiction can no longer be applied', maintaining that 'the everyday materials of the workers' own life are consciously and unashamedly transformed into art.'⁴³⁶ *Children of the Dead End* is a semi-autobiographical account of the author's life; it tells the story of Dermot Flynn and is written in the first person. In a brief foreword Macgill himself states, 'Most of my story is autobiographical.' and 'While asking a little allowance for the pen of the novelist it must be said that nearly all the incidents of the book have come under the observation of the writer'.⁴³⁷ The author also asserts in this foreword that some of the characters portrayed are 'true to life'. Interestingly, within the actual novel the author as commentator observes:

In this true story, as in real life, men and women crop up for a moment, do something or say something, then go away.⁴³⁸

This is an observation which raises a peculiar conundrum as to the nature of 'real life' as opposed to a 'true story'. Macgill as narrator/commentator seems to be aware of a difference between the truth and reality and further he seems to observe that his story, though true, is not actuality, raising a distinction which is worth keeping in mind when in chapter eight we become immersed in a definition of 'fiction' as opposed to what is sometimes referred to as 'faction'. The question immediately arises as to whether or not Macgill's narrative constitutes

⁴³⁵ Patrick Macgill, *Children of the Dead End* (London: New English Library, 1972)

⁴³⁶ Jack Mitchell, 'Early Harvest: Three Anti-Capitalist Novels published in 1914' in Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.76

⁴³⁷ *ibid*; p.5

⁴³⁸ *ibid*; p.88

a novel, a question which arises to a lesser extent with Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*,⁴³⁹ and perhaps it would be useful to keep in mind always the words of the Turkish Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk which relates both to what novelists write and what it is they say about what they have written:

Wondering about which parts are based on real-life experience and which parts are imagined is but one of the pleasures we find in reading a novel. Another, related pleasure stems from reading what novelists say in their prefaces, on book jackets, in interviews, and in memoirs as they try to persuade us that their real-life experiences are products of their imagination or that their made-up narratives are true stories [...] this "meta literature", which sometimes takes a theoretical metaphysical or poetic form [...]⁴⁴⁰

Macgill himself was born in 1890, he left school aged just ten to work as a potato-picker and navvy. His parents were illiterate peasants and initially he showed no interest whatsoever in literature and did not even attempt to read the daily newspapers. However, he apparently came across some words of poetry at an early age, words which moved him, and he then began to read avidly over a wide spectrum; *Sartor Resartus*, *Les Miserables* and *Das Kapital*. and it is recorded that whenever he was in employment he set aside a few shillings each week with which to buy books.⁴⁴¹

It is worthwhile drawing attention to the title of the novel which includes the word 'Children', for it is something easily forgotten as the reader traces the paths trodden by the central character in an adult world. This novel takes the reader from Ireland when our 'hero' Dermot is twelve years old and living a life of poverty wherein his younger brother Dan dies because 'there was no money in the house to pay the (doctor's) bill',⁴⁴² and where children are bought

⁴³⁹ Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2006)

⁴⁴⁰ Orhan Pamuk, *The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist: Understanding What Happens When We Write and Read Novels* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p.36

⁴⁴¹ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale: University Press, 2010), p.418

⁴⁴² Patrick Macgill, *Children of the Dead End* (London: New English Library, 1972), p.25

and sold in the 'hiring markets' of Strabane as virtual tied-slaves. The author/narrator describes his own bondage to a wealthy landowner for six months thus: 'I was only an article of exchange, something which represented so much amidst the implements and beast of the farm'.⁴⁴³

Clearly there is a *them* and *us* difference highlighted here in its most definitive form; slave-owners/dealers on the one hand, and bondage-slaves on the other.

Dermod Flynn 'escapes' to Scotland and is selected into a navvy gang on Greenock quay then sent to Buteshire to work in the fields for a potato-merchant; a preliminary to becoming an itinerant navvy hired to wield a pick or a shovel. While working as a navvy he writes stories and sends them to small newspapers and they are published in several dailies including the London based *Dawn*. He persists with his writings until the time comes when he 'washed the dirt of honest work from (his) hands',⁴⁴⁴ and sets out to become a writer/journalist in the metropolis, exposing an interesting implication in the narrator's words that there is a difference, perhaps a *them* and *us* difference, between those who toil manually and whose work therefore is 'honest' and those who write for a living and who have no 'honest dirt' on their hands.

The story of Dermod Flynn then is presented as *Bildungsroman*, Flynn progresses and escapes the poverty of childhood in much the same way the author did. However, although this journey describes his progress from being sold as a virtual slave, to becoming a white collar journalist, it is not, one feels, the prime concern of the author. Rather the journey is a vehicle in which the author is given permission as it were to explore the very nature of human relationships and it is by emphasising that such people as Moleskin Joe, Carrotty Dan, Gourock Ellen and the saintly, angelic and vaguely unreal Norah, while labelled as

⁴⁴³ *ibid*; p.39

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid*; p.168

being among the lowest in society, are still capable of great insights and kindness similar to those described in *This Slavery*. It is against this backdrop that the reader witnesses the unfurling of the hero's character. The author/narrator is also responsible for much social commentary within the novel; however it is a very working-class commentary and does not advocate concrete solutions. Dermot for example expresses a frustrating inability to see what is *really* oppressing his class as when he comments on prostitution which he perceives is forced upon women:

A blind rage welled up in my heart against the social system that compelled women to seek a livelihood by pandering to the impurity of men.⁴⁴⁵

And he progresses his 'rage' to inform the reader of his anger

[...] with the social system which was responsible for such a state of affairs, but my anger was thrown away; it was a monstrous futility. The social system is not like a person; one man's anger cannot remedy it.⁴⁴⁶

However; despite the reference to 'one man's anger' this is the voice of a very young man, a child in fact, and the reader witnesses in his words the beginnings of a social-consciousness which may indeed culminate, ironically with the help of the women he claims not to understand, into a more complete awareness.

While exploring the essential nature of these characters, Macgill as author/narrator seems constantly 'wary' of the kindness of women which initially Dermot does not comprehend and Dermot's first encounter with women outside of his family indicates that he views them as some kind of alien species or zoo animals to be examined:

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid*; p.166

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid*; p.166

[...] the two extra women needed for the (potato-picking) squad were withered and wrinkled harridans picked from the city slums.

“D’ye see them?” Mickey’s Jim whispered to me. “They cannot make a livin’ on the streets, so they have come to work with us. What d’ye think of them?”

“I don’t like the look of them,” I said.⁴⁴⁷

Women are initially therefore ‘other’; they are alien and although viewed with a mixture of suspicion and awe. Dermod sees them as more ‘pure’ than men to the extent that when he discovers that the saintly Nora has actually slept with another man he observes, ‘A blind rage welled up [...] against the social system that compelled women to seek a living by the impurity of men.’⁴⁴⁸ And yet it is one of these same working-women, Gourock Ellen, who displays an act of kindness to a ‘bent and wrinkled man’ who stops by as the potato-pickers eat their evening meal: ‘He looked greedily towards the fire, and Gourock Ellen handed him three hot potatoes.’⁴⁴⁹ Perhaps learning from the woman Dermod too shares his meal with this stranger: ‘I felt sorry for the man. I handed him the can of milk which I had procured from the farmhouse.’⁴⁵⁰ Norah too bestows an act of kindness, but furtively:

I saw Norah speaking to the old man. She was on the point of leaving the place, and I saw some money pass from her hand to that of the stranger.⁴⁵¹

Dermod’s reaction has an innocent honesty to it for he observes:

What surprised me most was the furtive way in which she did a kindness. For myself, when doing a good action, I like everybody to notice it.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.60

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid*; p.166

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid*; p.62

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁴⁵¹ *ibid*; p.63

⁴⁵² *ibid*

As if to emphasise this 'otherness' of women our hero ponders as he lies on his bunk:

Hitherto I had a great belief in women, their purity, virtue, and gentleness. But now my grand dreams of womanhood had collapsed. The foul words, the loose jokes and obscene songs of the two women who were strangers [...] had turned my young visions into nightmares.⁴⁵³

It would be easy to identify a difference here, a *them* and *us* division of the sexes, but it should be remembered that our hero at the time is not yet even a teenager, he is a child of twelve years of age, witnessing for the first time in his life a dawning awareness that these women, though he fails to understand them and perceives them as 'nightmares', are in fact much the same essentially as the men with whom he works, the man he will become. The gradual revelation that these 'nightmares' are in fact simply ordinary human-beings dawns on the boy slowly and it is with awe that he realises that they are capable of great goodness; Dermot has 'lost' his 'soiled under garments'⁴⁵⁴ and is searching for them when he discovers that 'Gourock Ellen had washed them for me.'⁴⁵⁵ She will not accept payment for this. Our hero, on his journey from boy to man, further observes that

Nearly everyone in the squad looked upon the two women with contempt and disgust, and I must confess that I shared the general feeling [...] I cannot explain why I then disliked Gourock Ellen, despite what she had done for me, and today I regret the ignorance of youth which caused me to despise a human being who was infinitely better than myself.⁴⁵⁶

The key here is the phrase 'the ignorance of youth', although it has to be noted that even towards the end of the novel, when the women emerge as strong and humane individuals capable of great solidarity, that the author/narrator never loses the reverence he seems to

⁴⁵³ *ibid*; p.65

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid*; p.65

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid*; p.66

have with regard to women in general. Thus it seems not to be a difference centring upon the difference in their age, although his immaturity must certainly cloud his perspective; it is a difference in his expectations of the opposite sex which is gradually being gnawed away at by experience.

If there is then a difference, if men and women are part of an observable *them* and *us*, it is a difference based to some extent on the lack of experience of the author/narrator and not one which is otherwise identifiable. It is one which is constantly in a state of flux as this pilgrim progresses towards his personal salvation at the conclusion of the novel.

The women in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*⁴⁵⁷ are peripheral and alien also. This novel was written and first published in 1956, some forty two years after Macgill was writing and it is arguably not a working-class novel as few of the central characters actually work. The author, although born in Trinidad to relatively poor East Indian parents, was well educated and, except for a period during the Second World War when he worked as a wireless operator with the Royal Naval Reserve, he was a 'professional' writer for all of his life. *The Lonely Londoners* is in many ways a novel which observes and records an era and in so doing encapsulates and explores elements of *them* and *us*. More than any novel I have read this novel reveals the truth of the observation that 'character is plot'⁴⁵⁸ and Selvon's characters are the vehicles upon which his observation of the colonization of Britain is hung; a colonization which Susheila Nasta in the introduction to the novel neatly refers to as an 'ironic reversal of the El Dorado myth'.⁴⁵⁹ The author employs a peculiar alienation-technique in order to present the book as more than a simple record of life and this technique involves creating a fusion of standard English language with an idiomatic or colloquial 'slang' as spoken by most of the West Indian immigrant central characters in the novel. The result is

⁴⁵⁷ Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2006)

⁴⁵⁸ Attributed to Scot Fitzgerald and quoted as being said by him in dozens of literary tomes; however it cannot be found in any of Fitzgerald's writings insofar as I can ascertain.

⁴⁵⁹ Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2006), p.v

that although the language seems familiar it is in fact alien; rather like the characters themselves who in some ways are portrayed as caricatures.

These caricatures however, mainly 'spades' or West Indian immigrants to London, if not working-class themselves are identified as *part* of the working-class:

The place where Tolroy and the family living was off the Harrow road, and the people in that area call the Working Class. Wherever in London that it have Working Class, there you will find a lot of spades. This is the real world, where men know what it is to hustle a pound to pay the rent when Friday come. The houses around here old and grey and weatherbeaten, the walls cracking [...] it aint have no hot water [...] none of the houses have bath [...] Some of the houses still have gas light [...] the street does be always dirty except if rin fall [...] It always have little children playing in the road, because they aint have no other place to play [...] and some of the walls have signs painted like Vote Labour and Down With the Tories [...] It have people living in London who don't know what happening in the room next to them [...] London is a place like that. It divide up in little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to⁴⁶⁰

Thus, in a novel about the immigrant population and the problems which they face, the author sees little difference, if any, between any perceived *them* and the working class. There is however an observable division between working-class white people and 'spades' although this is artificial, some kind of deformed sociological division which creates an almost mythical *them* and an equally mythical *us* in that the characters verge on the edge of caricature. The narrator observes that perhaps the division is created by the metropolis itself which produces divisions even among people facing identical problems; 'London is a place like that. It divide up in little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to'.⁴⁶¹ Despite this reflection our author/commentator feels free to inform the reader:

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid*; pp.59-60

⁴⁶¹ *ibid*; p.60

People get tired after a time with who poor and who rich and who catching arse and who well off, they don't care anymore.

It have a kind of communal feeling with the Working Class and the spades, because when you poor things level out, it don't have much up and down.⁴⁶²

This is a perceptive observation in the sense that it recognises a kind of mentality which has it that the characters are, despite superficial differences, all in the same boat and the linking-point is mutual poverty.

Selvon concentrates on isolation and loneliness which although it affects both groups seems to isolate the 'spades' more. The narrator ignores the conflict and violent encounters which were alive and present at the time as outlined for example in novels such as *Absolute Beginners*⁴⁶³ and instead highlights a loneliness within the groups which he implies are all in many ways working-class but where such 'loneliness' resides mainly with the 'spades'.

Women in *The Lonely Londoners* are spoken *about* rather than represented; they are often victims of casual abuse. They are nameless people; 'the German' or 'the English girl',⁴⁶⁴ 'the Austrian girl',⁴⁶⁵ or 'the French girl',⁴⁶⁶ and are victims of theft as when Cap steals the English girl's watch in order to pawn it,⁴⁶⁷ or victims of male brutality as when Lewis continually subjects Agnes to physical assaults⁴⁶⁸ causing Tolroy to advise Tanty, 'you better advice (sic) that Lewis that he better stop beating Agnes. Here is not Jamaica, you know.'⁴⁶⁹ This is a comment which hints at a seldom identified difference between *them* and *us*; the constant struggle of some of the 'spades' to adjust to a new and alien culture.

⁴⁶² *ibid*; p.61

⁴⁶³ Colin MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners* (London: Allison and Busby, 2011)

⁴⁶⁴ Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2006), p.37

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid*; p.39

⁴⁶⁶ *ibid*; p.43

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid*; p.38

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid*; p.54

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid*; p.58

In a lengthy stream-of-consciousness section⁴⁷⁰ the commentator observes the general scene of summer in the city and among the observations he centres upon are those of 'Cap', yet again, 'conning' an anonymous woman, and of women (black and white) prostituting themselves while the men observe that

[...] the cruder you are the more the girls like you [...] all they want you to live up to the films and stories they hear about black people living primitive in the jungles of the world.⁴⁷¹

Middle and upper-class women pay Moses to come with them to a club in Knightsbridge where there are

[...] women and fellas all about drinking champagne and whisky this girl who pick him up get high and start to dance the cancan [...] they feel they can't get big thrills unless they have a black man in their company⁴⁷²

This is an ironically observed twist on 'prostitution' and the exploitation of a somewhat alien, or at least different, *us* by *them* which, although it is a kind of manipulation propagated by stereotypes in films and stories, is apparently accepted by both groups.

There is however no moving to awareness in Selvon's novel, not by the central characters anyway. In *Children of the Dead End*, men and women kneel together as a realisation dawns upon Macgill's hero of the immense generosity and continual kindnesses shown by women and Dermod experiences a dawning awareness which is very much like a rebirth as they kneel together at the deathbed of his beloved Norah.⁴⁷³ Although the scene is contrived to the point of being melodramatic it is the logical conclusion to this *Bildungsroman* excursion. Selvon, however, is not a concrete part of the action as Macgill is, he is the uninvolved

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid*; p92

⁴⁷¹ *ibid*; p.100

⁴⁷² *ibid*; pp.100-101

⁴⁷³ Patrick Macgill, *Children of the Dead End* (London: New English Library, 1972), p.188

observer and thus it is sufficient to record and to witness the scene which unfurls, expressing his 'comment' or 'opinion' only via the narrator's astute surveillance of character.

*How late it was, how late*⁴⁷⁴ won the Booker Prize for the author James Kelman and like Selvon he creates a very special dialect to convey the narrative story of Sammy, told by himself. The author is Govan born and left school aged fifteen with no educational qualifications and thus it feels safe to attach the 'working-class' label to him, although in truth he never soiled his hands with anything other than ink for most of his life, being a political campaigner of the left and a writer who met with relatively early success.⁴⁷⁵ Schagen points out that the central character might also have a problem with such a label; 'the term working-class does seem a bit inappropriate for the working-class individual (Sammy) actually does not work at all.'⁴⁷⁶ However, the empathy exuding from the novel is for the working or under-class and against the opposition, or *them*, who mainly comprise the 'sodgers',⁴⁷⁷ and various figures of 'authority' who seem intent on making life difficult for 'the bold Sammy'.

How late it was, how late presents a peculiar slant with regard to women because in effect the reader never meets any. They are present though in the narrative which Sammy, the novel's hero, constantly engages the reader with, and although I say 'women' there is essentially only one woman and that is Sammy's wife/girlfriend Helen. However, other women do crop up as peripheral players in Sammy's saga. The novel has many threads and one of these is Sammy's quest to re-engage in some way with Helen whom he vaguely remembers having an argument with but who has now apparently disappeared. Blinded by the fists and boots of 'sodgers', Sammy stumbles eyeless in Glasgow, a bold and indomitable

⁴⁷⁴ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London: Minerva, 1995)

⁴⁷⁵ James Kelman Biography on 'BBC; Writing Scotland'
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/5SBCngLClyJs30G03BtvS6m/james-kelman>
 (accessed May 2nd 2015)

⁴⁷⁶ Vera van Schagen, 'Dispossessed White Trash Change, Distance and Disaffection in Contemporary Working Class Literature' *MA Thesis, Western Literature and Culture*, (Utrecht: University Press, March 2006), p.36

⁴⁷⁷ 'Sodgers' are police; the word is aesthetically satisfying; it sounds like the dialect phrase 'sod yous' but also conjures the word 'soldiers'.

Samson who blames no one for his plight except himself to the extent that this notion of blamelessness becomes a refrain which echoes and re-echoes:

[...] he hadnay led the best of lives [...] He had aye been a bit stupid. And there's nay cunt to blame for that except yerself. Nay point blaming the sodgers [...] ye cannay blame them for giving ye a doing.⁴⁷⁸

and

I'm blind, I know it wasnay the polis's fault they're only doing their bloody job [...] I'm no blaming them, no in that way, it wasnay bloody intentional I mean⁴⁷⁹

The reader however will note that the more 'the bold Sammy' insists that the 'sodgers' are not to blame the more this same reader may be inclined to question the statement; perhaps Sammy protests too much as to the lack of culpability of the *them* who blinded him. Like Jason or Oedipus Sammy has a task to complete and that task is to find Helen whom he vaguely remembers he is in 'deep shit' with.⁴⁸⁰

Helen is 'seen' through Sammy's narrative, reengaging with his recall, his recent memories. She is slowly unfurled and revealed in substance. As Sammy's quest continues the reader learns that Helen is very like Sammy in that she shoulders personal responsibility for all that life has thrown at her and that through her own fault she has had 'her weans taken off her'.⁴⁸¹ She has no access to them although poignantly she is reluctant to go to England with Sammy because her children are in Scotland and Sammy observes:

⁴⁷⁸ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London: Minerva, 1995), p.15

⁴⁷⁹ *ibid*; p.107

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid*; p.7

⁴⁸¹ *ibid*; p.135

England, she was nay against the idea; it was just the weans, she didna want to be too far away [...] Imagine losing yer weans but! For a woman I'm talking about [...] Auld Helen man it was a shame. Nay wonder she got depressed.⁴⁸²

Sammy makes a distinction between what women may feel and what men may feel (at the loss of children) and he also recalls that Helen 'was a bit of a feminist the same woman'.⁴⁸³

Thus the single female character in the novel is someone who exists only in the narrative of Sammy and to a lesser extent Sammy's son who asks about his dad's 'girlfriend', thus all the reader knows of her is filtered via the bold Sammy's recall which may, or may not be, reliable. Towards the end of the novel, when Sammy is 'escaping' to London, he has it in mind that Helen and he might become landlords of a pub and he tells Peter; 'Once I get fixed up and that, I'll be sending for her [...] we get on fine the gether'.⁴⁸⁴ However, whether they 'get on fine the gether' and whether it is true that she lost her children 'through her own fault'⁴⁸⁵ is Sammy's recall of how things were or are. In the 'bold Sammy' perhaps we have what Booth refers to as an unreliable narrator.⁴⁸⁶ Such a literary device however; placing words in the mouth of a protagonist which the reader may doubt, may either reinforce our already framed 'picture' of the bold Sammy or may cause us to give pause; whichever, the simple statement 'we get on fine the gether' surely activates a dialogue within the reader's mind and perhaps in our debate cause us to reassign him in the *them/us* debate.

There is an absence of women and an absence of any woman's voice in all of these three novels which may well indicate that women constitute an underclass, or at least a class which is ethereal and almost invisible; either the women do not exist as any form of reality as with Kelman or they exist only when described by men as with Selvon or they are mysterious and misunderstood beings in another realm as with Macgill. Thus though women are

⁴⁸² *ibid*; p.154

⁴⁸³ *ibid*; p.70

⁴⁸⁴ *ibid*; p.353

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁸⁶ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.211

essentially 'immaterial', they cannot truly be said to constitute an 'other', a *them* as opposed to an *us*, because they simply do not exist except as reflections of male perceptions.

However, what these novels do hold in common is their sense of that underclass who constitute the 'outcasts of the world'.⁴⁸⁷ The individuals, who are mainly though not exclusively male, are so alienated from society that society itself becomes *them*. It could be argued that because women are treated as being in some sense 'other', and it is perhaps safe to also classify them as some form of *them*, an alien section of society who either do not really exist (Kelman) or who are an abused section of society (Selvon) or who are in some way mysterious and yet capable of assisting men to a new salvation. (Macgill) If there is a representation of an underclass in these novels then perhaps it is not overstepping the bounds of probability to see women as being aliens in a male dominated world or an almost invisible-underclass.

Peculiarly there is a singular and to some extent 'lonely' voice which narrates each of these novels and there is also a sociological aspect to each with the author's voice prominently describing a 'history' of the period or, as in Kelman's case, the history of the specific ordeals of a single member of this underclass in a manner which is almost a clinical record of fact. Each author claims to be stating as a voice of experience that 'this is how it actually is'. The underclass at issue are not uniform, the only thing which binds them together is their isolation from the mainstream of society. Men struggle to understand and to empathise with women and thus a reader is left instead with generalisations that reveal only that women are mysteriously 'other'.

Macgill's central characters are in the main employed at menial tasks, between-jobs, or virtual slaves. They are itinerant and to some extent lawless as they move around the country as a group or as individuals who collide occasionally and they have their own

⁴⁸⁷ Patrick Macgill, *Children of the Dead End* (London: New English Library, 1972), p.136

morality and standards. Selvon's characters however are mainly drifting within society, work is not central to their lives and their loyalties lie as much with Trinidad as they do with London; the 'spades' form a small society-within-a-society, a class-within-a-class, and again, their own rules, morality and codes predominate. Selvon's central character, the 'bold' Sammy, is involved in something nefarious, perhaps in the theft or the fencing of some 'dress shirts'.⁴⁸⁸ Sammy's world is a surreal nightmare, he is a modern Josef K⁴⁸⁹ trapped in a sightless world where his 'accusers' range from 'sodgers' who inflict violence upon him to Doctor Logan⁴⁹⁰ who appears to have stepped straight out of a surreal nightmare or is a creation from the theatre of the absurd. Doctor Logan eventually prescribes 'an ointment which you may apply to areas of your upper trunk',⁴⁹¹ this, in order to treat Sammy's blindness. An extensive interview with Doctor Logan ends with this exchange:

Are ye saying that you don't really think I'm blind?

Pardon?

Ye saying ye don't think I'm blind?

Of course not.

Well what are ye saying?

I told you a minute ago.

Could ye repeat it please?

In respect of the visual stimuli presented you appeared unable to respond.

So ye no saying I'm blind?

It isnt for me to say.

Aye but you're a doctor.

Yes.

So ye can give an opinion?

Anyone can give an opinion.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁸ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London: Minerva, 1995), p.252

⁴⁸⁹ The Central character in Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial* who is persecuted for unspecified crimes. Franz Kafka, *The Trial* Translated by Idris Parry (London: Penguin Modern Classics), 2000

⁴⁹⁰ James Kelman, *How late it was, how late* (London: Minerva, 1995), pp.216-224

⁴⁹¹ *ibid*; p.224

⁴⁹² *ibid*; p.225

Onto Sammy's grotesquely absurd stage there stroll characters such as Ally who thinks there is a possibility that Sammy is feigning blindness so he can claim benefits and who wants to be his professional representative in case Sammy sues the 'polis' or wants to claim disability benefits from the DSS. Ally is very adept at identifying *them* whom he sees as 'the system'⁴⁹³ and to advocate an opinion which, it is hinted, is widespread among the underclass, that they or *them* make up the rules as they go along:

[...] politics, it's something else, what ye might call a variable [...] Politics can make *them* fling away the rule book [...] Ye have to understand about the law, it is nay there to apply to *them*, it's there to apply to *us*, it's *them* that makes it.⁴⁹⁴ (my italics)

Clearly the *them* referred to are quite specific, they constitute those who make the rules which *us* have to abide by and between the two stand the 'polis' who enforce the rules. A very similar perspective with regard to the role of the police to that presented by Holdsworth (chapter six) Jones, and Plunkett (chapter nine).

One other book which deals with isolated people is *A Picture to Hang on the Wall*⁴⁹⁵ by Sean Hignett. The novel is set in the mid-sixties in the heart of a bustling city; the story of a group of students or would-be students surviving in post-war Liverpool.

The novel reinforces all the stereotypical prejudices about 'scousers' with the central characters being work-shy layabouts and occasional vacuum-cleaner sales-men⁴⁹⁶ lurching from pub to pub until it is time to collect their National Assistance on a Friday. Towards Christmas they are allocated jobs on the postal services delivering Christmas Mail and they thief from their own by stealing bottles of whiskey destined for the less prosperous areas of

⁴⁹³ *ibid*; p.236

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid*; p.310

⁴⁹⁵ Sean Hignett, *A Picture to Hang on the Wall* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966)

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid*; p.23

Liverpool.⁴⁹⁷ Our 'hero' is Keegan, a Catholic youth whose sex life is abusive and callous. The reader is presented with a view of Keegan as a being constantly plagued with post-coital guilt and the desire to 'escape' from sexual involvement after the physical act is consummated. He is vaguely arty, vaguely literate, prone to misquoting writers and misspelling the names of Labour MPs.⁴⁹⁸

It is the mid-sixties,⁴⁹⁹ money is 'real', an illegal abortion costs twenty five guineas⁵⁰⁰ and beer costs 1s and 10d a pint, 'The Girl from Ipanema' rides high in the juke-box charts, it is a time when the overspill towns with their high-rise flats were being created to replace houses and communities bombed out during the war.⁵⁰¹ However, the reader will find nothing of social significance in Hignett's novel except passing nostalgic references to the demise of this pub or that pub.⁵⁰² Although the central characters are vaguely described as drop-out art students there is nothing at all of any cultural worth which they discuss which would in any way indicate even a passing interest in 'art'; instead the author appears fascinated by the antics of a group of stereotypical low-lives. The novelist/narrator feels it necessary to tell the reader not only every single word which he and everyone else utters but also to inform the reader as to what he might have said or what he would have liked to say as in this exchange:

"[...]have you got a threepenny bit and I'll give you three pennies?"

"Do you want it for the phone?"

No you dafget, I want to give it to the mission brothers to stuff up their holy arses, thanks be to God on our supplication, the Lord have mercy on these bronze suppositories.

"Yes that's the rough idea. I want to make a telephone call. It's very urgent."

⁴⁹⁷ *ibid*; p.256

⁴⁹⁸ *ibid*; p.130

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.207

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid*; p.274

⁵⁰¹ Tony Lane, 'Liverpool—City of Harder Times to Come' in Martin Jacques (Ed.), *Marxism Today*, November, 1978

⁵⁰² Sean Hignett, *A Picture to Hang on the Wall* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966), p.156

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Somebody ill?”

Yes, me, dying of bloody lust and frustration.

“Something like that. Have you got one?”

“I’ll have a look.”⁵⁰³

Most of the characters are two-dimensional with the women portrayed as even less than that and the ‘hero’ is an unlovable, self-centred egoist whom ‘nothing bothers’.⁵⁰⁴ He is portrayed as drifting aimlessly in his quest for a Holy Grail which apparently centres around avoiding paying his way in the pub and having at least two ‘Judies’ on the go at the one time and then callously attacking one of the ‘Judies’ when she becomes pregnant with this retort:

‘I thought you might want me to have it. It’s your child.’

‘My child! My prick it is. It’s your fucking overgrown foetus [...] Yeah, of course I want you to have it – as soon as bloody possible. Next week or sooner. The sooner the bloody better.’⁵⁰⁵

Without asking the pregnant woman if she has an opinion or a preference our ‘hero’ organises an abortion which his other ‘Judie’ pays for and when he brings yet another ‘Judie’ back to his flat where the abortion has already taken place and she discovers a foetus floating in the toilet bowl.⁵⁰⁶ In a shallow portrayal of emotions Keegan then wanders in the grave-yard of the Anglican Cathedral reading the tomb notifications of other children who had died before using a broken bottle to scrawl on a tomb stone; ‘A Merry Christmas to all our Readers’.

The novel ends with a verse from an Irish folk song from which the novel draws its title. The words of the song include; ‘I don’t work for a living/ I get along alright without [...] Oh give me

⁵⁰³ *ibid*; p.158

⁵⁰⁴ *ibid*; p.120

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid*; p.251

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid*; p.301

a nail and a hammer/ And a picture to hang on the wall'.⁵⁰⁷ It is an ironically comic song in the mode of 'if you didn't laugh you'd cry' and maybe this is how the author intended the novel to read. However, it is centred too 'self'ishly for any irony to permeate. The outside realities of the political, cultural or social powers at work in the community never penetrate the covers of the novel but even more than that they are seldom even acknowledged except with a sneer or with indifference and it is possible to put aside the novel feeling no empathy at all that relates to these self-obsessed Teds, Spades and drifters who would seem to be a close approximation to modern-day 'dole-scroungers'.

However, where this novel *is* of interest in this thesis lies in its portrayal of women as victims to be abused. Within the underclass, which the author identifies, an apparent egalitarianism resides although this does not extend to women. For Keegan, apparently obsessed with the sexual act, which is compared several times throughout the novel to dogs-copulating, women appear to represent an external 'other': they become part of some vague and alien *them*, and they are continuously abused and referred to in disparaging terms. Keegan displays an utter revulsion for the prey he seeks out in order to gratify his lust remarking at one point, 'No wonder they (women) were lower than camels in some countries.'⁵⁰⁸

Before I proceed it may be necessary for me to explain my own 'tone' when writing about this novel in particular. I refer to Walker Gibson's notion of a 'mock reader' who accompanies the real reader of a text and who is 'an artefact, controlled, simplified, abstracted out of the chaos of day-to-day sensation.'⁵⁰⁹ The 'mock reader' is someone concealing an awareness of a 'violent disparity'⁵¹⁰ between self and reader, a kind of alienation technique which recognises what may be propaganda in the text but who also realises that it may simply be a

⁵⁰⁷ *ibid*; p.314

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid*; p.84

⁵⁰⁹ Gibson Walker, 'Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers' in Jane, P. Tompkins (Ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.2

⁵¹⁰ *ibid*

different way of seeing. Nonetheless I do recognise that as this novel deals with both a time and a place where I was in fact present and indeed where, being the same age as the central characters, I frequented the same clubs, pubs and employment exchanges, I am perhaps inclined to 'adopt' a mock reader approach although I do recognise that sometimes a judgemental 'me' might show through the cracks. If this is so I shall try to identify it.

So Hignett's novel may represent some of the 'outcasts of the world' but it has no sense whatsoever that the plight of these individuals is dependent or caused by something or someone identifiable. This nihilistic novel is included herein because it denies the existence of any feelings of love or compassion between the sexes, being a dispassionate record of uninspiring events and the sordid occupations and pursuits of people whom the reader is not allowed to identify with in any way. To that extent it reads as though it has no political axe to grind and thus it becomes a foil alongside which 'opinionated' novels may be viewed.

Stephen Bayley, in an article in *The New Statesman*,⁵¹¹ described Hignett's novel as: 'a roman à clef full of still recognisable characters'. The phrase of Bayley's suggests a novel in which actual persons and events are disguised as fictional characters and I am sure this is true.

Hignett's novel, like Brierley's *Means Test Man*⁵¹² (chapter eight), shows a private and limited perspective and a community, which while not apparently acknowledging outside forces that subtly control the way things are, nonetheless describes in detail the hopeless futility of life as lived by these central characters. Hignett's characters are part of a sub-culture which has its own morality and its own codes but is not one which radically seeks converts. As a counterpoint to the other novels discussed in this chapter it is unique in its

⁵¹¹ Stephen Bayley, 'Manhattan on Mersey' in *The New Statesman* April 3rd (2008)

⁵¹² Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011)

tireless recording of detail and its lack of critical comment upon external forces at work. I see the scenario as created by Hignett as being in many ways like a picture which anyone of us might choose to hang on the wall in that it is something to be viewed *en passant*, a moment in time which concentrates on some of *us* but which does not necessarily have a perspective on *them*.

Where it is similar to Brierley's novel is that it is nihilistic and personal, it describes scenarios which many individuals will have experienced but from a different perspective and thus it emphasises one of the central themes of this thesis; that although there are clear divisions portrayed by various writers which indicate a very real division between *them* and *us*, there are always voices which remind us that such divisions are to some extent arbitrary. That is one of the main reasons why Hignett's novel is included herein.

Hignett's novel is a detailed diary of controlled despair and casts a nod in the direction of the notion that life is as-it-is and there is very little if anything which can be done to change it except to steal the odd bottle of whiskey, abuse women and live under the illusion that it is *us* who manipulate the System and not the other way round. It strongly indicates a division between men and women but it is not in any way convincing in its portrayal and it seeks no explanation or analysis of either this phenomenon (if it actually exists) or the broader divisions within society which might explain or even suggest why the central characters are as they are.

So who comprises the underclass and the 'other' in these novels? The *them* and the *us*? For Kelman, McGill and Selvon there is a pervading sense of isolation, it is almost as if the System does not affect the characters individually because they have other battles to fight, sometimes in order to survive.

Hignett's novel links us more closely to what is to follow, presenting as it does a group in society who while under the ultimate control of the System nonetheless feel secure in the seedy, self-centred and delusional world which they have created. I would maintain that perhaps Hignett is not a 'proletarian writer' at all; perhaps he should be allocated a place as a bridging slot between those different perspectives identified by Snee. It seems probable that *A Picture to Hang on the Wall* can lead us directly into an examination of 'working-class literature'.

Part two: 'them'**Chapter eight**

Carole Snee has speculated on a difference in the approaches of novels which are referred to broadly as working-class. She speaks about two different kinds of writing or literature which stems from the working-class; 'working-class literature' as opposed to 'proletarian-writing', and she adds that the latter has the issue of 'class as a primary determinant'.⁵¹³ Elsewhere the notion of a 'proletarian novel' has been regarded as being a novel 'about the working-classes and working-class life; perhaps with the intention of making propaganda'.⁵¹⁴ By examining this perceived difference, keeping in mind Cuddon's cautious reference to the novel 'perhaps' being a vehicle for 'propaganda', I write now about two British novels which have always seemed to me to be 'problematic'.

Elsewhere I have investigated novels which Snee would have labelled in the main as 'proletarian-writing'. In this chapter I propose to examine two novels which, I will argue, fall into the other camp. I am suggesting that both Hanley and Brierley are writing working-class literature as opposed to proletarian-writing and further, and more controversially perhaps, that this places them both in the *them* category. I shall also query their commitment to a certain definition of 'truth' which will include an envisaged class-loyalty that the novels discussed elsewhere generally encompass. This suggestion may further incorporate a possibility that these particular novels by Brierley and Hanley have a specific 'purpose', thus making them something bordering on propaganda. Whilst not denying the propaganda content of Tressell's, Jones or Holdsworth's novels I shall present an argument which suggests a hidden agenda in the works of both Brierley and Hanley.

⁵¹³ Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: a Test Case' in *Red Letters* issue 3 Autumn 1976, p.118

⁵¹⁴ J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin Books, 1999)

Walter Brierley's *Means-Test Man*,⁵¹⁵ written in 1934 and published a year later, describes a period in history when the defeat of the miners, some would say their betrayal by the TUC during the 1926 General Strike,⁵¹⁶ was a fresh and bitter memory. Brierley's novel is set at a time when a situation involving a clash between *them* and *us* aroused strong emotions for those concerned and still does today for many readers. The author however chooses to present the central characters as a bitter and isolated couple exhibiting only feelings of utter helplessness, a couple who exhibit no desire to fight back whatsoever, a couple expressing a continuous litany of hatred directed at neighbours, fellow workers and other unemployed individuals.

In reference to *Means-Test Man* Snee states that this

realist novel does not simply at best reveal and interrogate the dominant, unstated ideology, or exist uncritically within it, but can also incorporate a conscious ideological or class perspective, which in itself undercuts the ideological parameters of the genre, without necessarily transforming its structural boundaries.⁵¹⁷

She refers to the naturalistic style of this particular novel, asserting that it is 'apposite to the world Brierley creates and the structure of the work to reinforce the sense of fruitlessness and futility he (Brierley) is attempting to convey'.⁵¹⁸ I have no doubt that she is correct in terms of that which is portrayed superficially by Brierley; the tension within the family, the stress placed upon individuals by the presence of the means-test inspector and the stultifying effect of unemployment. However, I shall argue that at a different level the novel is portraying a defeatism and sense of isolation which was not the dominant reaction to these circumstances.

⁵¹⁵ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011)

⁵¹⁶ Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (London: Sutton Pub Ltd., 1999), p.5

⁵¹⁷ Carole Snee, 'Working-Class or Proletarian Writing?', in John Clark (Ed.), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1979), p169

⁵¹⁸ *ibid*; p11

The working-class novel is, arguably, a vehicle for an idea or an expression of solidarity (*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, *Cwmardy*, *We Live*, *This Slavery* etc.) and Snee has chosen to identify such novels as 'proletarian-writing'.⁵¹⁹ Brierley however presents to the reader his central characters Jack and Jane Cook who are defeated from the start, indeed on the first page of the first day of this description of a week-in-their-lives Jack describes his sleeping wife thus: 'she, like him, had lost the spiritual vigour they once had'.⁵²⁰ Jack describes the chores he does each day; scrubbing, bed-making, tidying the house, and although he does these tasks willingly he believes that 'to the miners he would have become a woman'.⁵²¹ Thus 'feminine' activities are done in secret and a theme of emasculation, and also of a peculiarly ritualistic 'rape', runs through Brierley's novel and it is undoubtedly true that being without employment, coupled with the added indignity of being means-assessed regularly, could be soul-sapping. Yet in the Cooks there is no spark of hope whatsoever.

Means-Test Man catalogues a week-in-the-life of the Cook family counting-down to the regular monthly visit from the means-test inspector and in page after page the author records little but despair. The impact of the means-test inspector on a family is traumatic; Haywood for example describes it thus:

To the respectable working-class family the Means Test was an unprecedented intrusion into their privacy [...] the symbol of a mean-spirited and vindictive state.⁵²²

Wilson would further have it that

the emphasis of the novel is on the psychological and social effects of unemployment.⁵²³

⁵¹⁹ Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: a Test Case' in *Red Letters* issue 3 Autumn 1976, p.118

⁵²⁰ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.3

⁵²¹ *ibid*; p.23

⁵²² Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), p.37

⁵²³ Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), p.101

At one level Wilson and Haywood are of course correct. I shall nonetheless argue that by concentrating on what the author of *Means-Test Man* perceives as the psychological effects of unemployment as opposed to the material deprivation and the social injustice he leaves the working-class reader with the feeling that their traditional morals, values, ideas and culture are worthless.

Before proceeding it should be noted that the critical commentary relating to Brierley's novel was split along class-divisions with the left-wing press denouncing it and the bourgeois press greeting it warmly. Fox quotes thus: "the *Economist* and the *Times Literary Supplement* crooned over the novel's 'unemphatic manner', 'admirable restraint', and 'detachment'"⁵²⁴ and she also refers to the fact that the novel 'came to acquire status as an updated "Condition of England" report, seen as required reading for all members of Parliament'.⁵²⁵

To begin to see why this should be it is useful to turn first of all to the author himself, to examine his background and his values. By so doing a reader may be able to gain a better understanding of the text as it was intended to be perceived by the author. I say 'intended' in recognition of Barthes' observations on the subjectivity of texts as outlined in *The Death of the Author*,⁵²⁶ but would argue also, as J. D. Kneale has it, that if individuals totally accept the concept of there being numerous valid interpretations of a text, 'popular culture is likely to become increasingly uncertain about absolute truth'.⁵²⁷ It is my contention that different readers identify different interpretations and even different meanings within texts because

⁵²⁴ Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p.136

⁵²⁵ *ibid*; p.135

⁵²⁶ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Aspen Journal*, (Colorado;1967)

⁵²⁷ J. D. Kneale, 'Deconstruction' in Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth and Imre Szeman (Eds.), *Contemporary Literary & Cultural Theory: The Johns Hopkins Guide* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p.108

‘diverse conventions relating to rhetoric govern their (the readers) interpretive standpoint’.⁵²⁸ Further, because authors also attempt to shape the way a reader interprets the text, the reader should use ‘textual, biographical, or historical evidence to clarify the intentions of the author’.⁵²⁹ For these reasons I feel that knowledge of the author’s background is essential if a reader is to fully understand his/her objectives and/or motives for writing.

Brierley was born in 1900 in Waingroves in Derbyshire, described by Brierley himself as ‘a one street village of a hundred houses’.⁵³⁰ Croft further quotes from Brierley’s own notes and informs us that he perceived himself to be ‘prosperous working-class’⁵³¹ and that the family were ‘active in the Chapel’. However, although he was a clever pupil he left school aged thirteen to work at the pit. He quickly realised that he was not cut out for life as a miner and began attending a ‘continuation-class’ where he studied English, French and Mathematics. This was a time when workers’ education was progressing under their own direction and there came into being the National Council of Labour Colleges,⁵³² however, Brierley never attended these and his new-found personal identification with education was, apparently, rooted in middle-class concepts and traditions, thus he was torn between two classes and (not unreasonably) dissatisfied with life in the mines.⁵³³ When the 1926 strike/lockout occurred Brierley was ‘ill’ throughout and when he returned to work following yet another defeat for the miners he continued with his plans to escape into the educated world by applying for and passing a scholarship to University College Nottingham where for four years (1927-31) he studied History, Latin, English Literature and Logic for two days a week; an experience he described in his novel *Sandwich Man*.⁵³⁴ He was forced to return to the pits when he failed his exams but he was apparently unpopular with work-mates and his ex-

⁵²⁸ Steven Mailloux, *Reception Histories: Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and American Cultural Politics, Rhetorical Power* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.46

⁵²⁹ *ibid*; p.46

⁵³⁰ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.vii

⁵³¹ *ibid*; p.vii

⁵³² C. Cook, (Ed.), *Routledge Guide to British Political Archives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006)

⁵³³ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.vii

⁵³⁴ Walter Brierley, *Sandwich Man* (London: Merlin Press, 1991)

employers; he was thus unemployed almost continuously from 1931 to 1935 when he certainly did have concrete experience of the means-test inspector.⁵³⁵ Fox draws attention to how Brierley's choice of educational path was influenced by his self-perception that he was 'respectable working-class':

[...] his enthusiasm as a WEA, rather than Labour College, student [...] led him to place great value on traditional culture and to experience continuous displacement as a worker/writer.⁵³⁶

I would also tend to agree with Haywood that '(Jack) Cook is based partly on Brierley himself'.⁵³⁷ It is of extreme interest that although the character of Jack Cook is presented as an 'honest' individual, Brierley's own experiences of life with the means-test was that of a man and his wife not being averse to a touch of deceit. Brierley's wife for example did dress-making and did not disclose the income and when Brierley himself was paid the (then) huge sum of £16.00 for writing an article for the *Listener* he concealed this also from the means-test inspector.⁵³⁸

So this is the author, born into a 'prosperous working-class family' who are involved actively in religious duties, he was not a man who indulged in politics or participated actively in strikes, instead he was someone who aspired to become a teacher in order to escape from working-class toil, a man whose aspirations made him unpopular with his working-class mates.

When *Means-Test Man* was published it was met by critical acclaim and high sales⁵³⁹ but the acclaim came, as was noted earlier, from the middle-class press while an article in the *Daily*

⁵³⁵ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.xiv

⁵³⁶ Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p.136

⁵³⁷ Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), p.66

⁵³⁸ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.xi

⁵³⁹ Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days; British Fiction in the 1930's* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990)

Worker described *Means-Test Man* thus:

The weakness of the book, recognisable perhaps only to those who have experienced long periods of unemployment, is that the unemployed worker who sits timidly at home waiting for the investigator is not the rule, but the exception.⁵⁴⁰

It is accepted that perhaps the *Daily Worker* has an agenda which would tend to react against the notion of a working-man sitting idly at home apparently unable or unwilling to participate in the struggle for socialism; nonetheless this is scathing criticism not only of the novel but also of the novelist, implying as it does a lack of integrity on the part of the author. The reviewer is suggesting a 'weakness' but is implying much more than that.

It is clear that Brierley's roots are in the working-class, however, his aspirations and his perspective, as revealed by his personal history, are middle-class and thus his concept of *them* as described in the novel differs from that of the majority of other working-class novelists discussed herein. Johnson puts it concisely when he states that Brierley 'represents the working man as the middle-class would like him to be; but not, fortunately, as he often is.'⁵⁴¹ With a suggestion that the author is presenting either something false or a perspective which is debatable. Fox goes further and suggests that *Means-Test Man* is written by an author who 'sought to escape his class origins and whose work studies the demoralised, if not debased, spirit of working class.'⁵⁴² More importantly the author sees the central characters Jack and Jane Cook as being isolated within their own class, living a life that is plagued by shame, anger and hatred. It is implied that the novel centres on the impending means-test but the hatred and isolation of the Cooks surely encompasses more than that monthly ritual. This isolation from the community is commented upon by Lucas who expands upon the point:

⁵⁴⁰ *Daily Worker*, May 1935

⁵⁴¹ Roy Johnson, 'Walter Brierley: Proletarian Writer' in *Red Letters* 2 (Summer 1976), p.7

⁵⁴² Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994) p.135

[...] there is something odd about Cook's isolation, the fact that he keeps himself apart from others, and his isolation does, as Wooley implies, seem atypical of the kinds of lives with which the novel engages. To put it rather differently: it isn't so much Cook's failure to raise a red duster against the system that disturbs me as Brierley's apparent indifference to community.⁵⁴³

At times Jack Cook's alienation causes him to adversely judge his fellow-workers whose 'idling' is seen as 'criminal'⁵⁴⁴ and they are perceived as being 'far below' him.⁵⁴⁵ There is no egalitarianism evident for although Jack helps with the household chores the home as a whole is not his domain and the narrator informs that Jane alone is the house 'wife' having 'no levels other than those of plain uncomplex living'.⁵⁴⁶ Often Jack's bitterness is vague and non-directional; 'anger and hate were hung onto minor things, their (Jack and Jane's) better natures were finding it hard to survive.'⁵⁴⁷

As stated at the outset Snee suggests a qualitative distinction between 'working-class literature' as opposed to 'proletarian writing' and further that the latter phrase presumes that the author is aware of 'class as a primary determinant'.⁵⁴⁸ Needless to say she categorises Brierley as belonging in the former category. This distinction is important in identifying the reasons why Brierley's novel was widely acclaimed by middle-class critics yet condemned by a newspaper more closely associated with the working-class at the time. *Means-Test Man* is indeed a working-class novel but it is not 'proletarian-writing' and that goes some way to explaining why the perceptions of *them* and *us* are different to those presented in other novels discussed herein. There is no specific portrayal of the role of the Church, the police or the System in Brierley's novel and political activity is considered by Jack Cook as being

⁵⁴³ John Lucas, 'Walter Brierley and Leslie Williamson'

http://www.pennilesspress.co.uk/prose/walter_brierley.htm (accessed July 3rd 2014), p.2

⁵⁴⁴ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.220

⁵⁴⁵ *ibid*; p.106

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid*; p.209

⁵⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.138

⁵⁴⁸ Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: a Test Case' in *Red Letters* issue 3 Autumn 1976, p.118

unlikely to change things:

[...] his wife, his child, another out-of-work; he did not feel like breaking windows for their sakes or chivying Members of Parliament [...] things were as they were.⁵⁴⁹

I would like also to raise an issue in connection with Snee's belief that 'proletarian-writing' holds 'class as a primary determinant'.⁵⁵⁰ In general I believe this to be true and that it not only refers to the class in which an author views themselves but also indicates where the empathy lies in novels which are clearly not written by working-class writers. However, I do not accept any contention that novels like *Means-Test Man* are written by an author who is unaware of class as a factor or as a determinant; on the contrary, I believe that Brierley is very aware of class as his determined efforts to slot himself into a new class indicate.

Jack Cook vindicates and overtly empathises with workers who undercut one another and who undermine the Trades Unions' effort to obtain decent rates of pay as his author/narrator speculates:

No wonder some men in the same condition as himself went to employers and offered to work for lower wages than the men who were already employed.⁵⁵¹

When finances are discussed there is a distinctly middle-class concern expressed. Not for the Cooks the agonising of Bill Easton and his wife Ruth in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* who have eaten no meat for three weeks,⁵⁵² or of the sacrifice of Ruth who would starve herself to give her man food, pretending she had eaten earlier.⁵⁵³ Instead, for

⁵⁴⁹ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.67

⁵⁵⁰ Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: a Test Case' in *Red Letters* issue 3 Autumn 1976, p.118

⁵⁵¹ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.87

⁵⁵² Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), pp.49-66

⁵⁵³ *ibid*; p.58

the Cooks the pain stems from having to dip into their 'savings',⁵⁵⁴ savings which apparently have not been revealed to the means-test inspector, although the author, perhaps because it is a sensitive area relating to his personal integrity, does not make this clear.

What comes through strongly is that the writing itself seems to be pervaded by a 'falseness'. The author presents his personal recollections within the story of Jack and Jane Cook perhaps, as has been suggested by Haywood,⁵⁵⁵ and this is an important point to understand; the recollections may well be accurate for Brierley but to most working-class people who have experience of similar situations I would suggest the response of the Cook family, directing their petty hatreds at neighbours, friends and even themselves, will not be recognised, will be alien. From a personal perspective I recognise that my own experiences cannot be laid aside when I read Brierley's novel and so I choose to openly present the notion that I bring to the reading of all literature my own baggage consisting of 'personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations'.⁵⁵⁶ These shape my perspectives, my ways of seeing. There are of course many other ways to read this novel; Wilson for example argues coherently that 'the emphasis of the novel is on the psychological and social effects of unemployment',⁵⁵⁷ however I hope to present a different and equally coherent alternative herein.

The Cooks' blanket-hatred is a hatred of that which makes *us* who we are. There is no mention whatsoever of any act of community kindness or solidarity within *Means-Test Man* as has been recognised and discussed in previous chapters. Page after page portrays a litany of hatred. Of course it could be that Brierley is not presenting his personal experiences, it is possible that he is simply saying that Jack and Jane Cook may exist out

⁵⁵⁴ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.137

⁵⁵⁵ Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), p.66

⁵⁵⁶ David Bleich, 'Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response' in Jane P. Tompkins, (Ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.145

⁵⁵⁷ Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), p.101

there somewhere or it could even be that he is asking the question; ‘...what might it feel like to be thus violated by a means-test inspector on a regular basis?’ As a practising psychologist myself I accept that it is possible that Brierley is recording a couple suffering from depression. But it is indisputable that the author has undergone this same experience relating to the means-test, it is indisputable that he was always alienated from the rank-and-file members of his own class and that his history reveals his aspiration to escape from his roots. It is also indisputable that he is presenting the character of Jack Cook as being wholly ethical with regard to his duty not to work ‘on the side’ or to ‘fiddle’ the System which is the opposite to that which Brierley himself did when in a similar situation. For this reader it seems highly likely that *Means-Test Man* is based on personal experience and that the author draws heavily on that experience when presenting the overriding hatred which the Cooks constantly express and which is directed entirely at their own class and the community in which they live. Brierley was himself alienated from his work-mates, lay ‘ill’ throughout periods of strikes and lockouts and sought at every opportunity to ‘escape’ from the class into which he was born. I should make it clear that this observation is not a criticism; it is a reiteration of facts identified earlier.

Ortega however would see my analysis of Brierley’s masterpiece as unfair, as he writes:

[...] it would be unfair to accuse this realist writer [Brierley] of overloaded pessimism or melodrama when living memory and the chronicles of the 1930’s corroborate that this was the prevalent feeling.⁵⁵⁸

Ortega then goes on to quote an opinion voiced by Orwell that the Means-Test ‘breaks up families’.⁵⁵⁹ Also Ortega quotes Marwick, who refers to ‘an unemployed worker’ saying that

⁵⁵⁸ Ramon Lopez Ortega, ‘The Language of the Working Class Novel of the 1930s’ in Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.129

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid*

'The Means Test and the capitalists [...] prevent me from having a decent life.'⁵⁶⁰ My contention however is not that the means-test is not degrading and demoralising but that what Brierley is writing about is the effect it has on the Cook family and that what he presents is scattergun-hatred aimed at everyone and a family who resist their neighbours, who resist their workmates, who resist everything, even each other, but who never resist the means-test or the means-test man.

When Ortega refers to 'the prevalent feeling' which is revealed by 'chronicles' he is however correct; in 1938 Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld described 'stages' through which unemployed individuals of the time progressed and they referred to people moving from 'optimism to resignation and despair', and further that there was a 'progressive deterioration' leading to 'social withdrawal' and 'political apathy';⁵⁶¹ many other studies at the time produced similar results. Thus I conclude a possibility that Brierley is recording the psychological effects on a small nuclear family.

Ortega further opines that 'Brierley never indulges in facile solutions'⁵⁶² which is correct, because Brierley never indulges in any solutions. In fact the whole tenor of the novel is that the Cook family are victims with no control over their lives whatsoever, thus any 'solution' would be facile and irrelevant. Ortega further informs us that 'he [Jack Cook] is fully aware of the roots of the social malaise'⁵⁶³ and then he quotes from the novel: 'His hate, was against the fact that such a system could be'.⁵⁶⁴ Unfortunately Ortega chooses to ignore the fact that throughout the book this is Jack Cook's one and only recognition of the System as being at fault and that it is set amongst literally hundreds of examples of the Cooks' hatred which is

⁵⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁵⁶¹ P. Eisenberg and P. F. Lazarsfeld, 'The Psychological Effects of Unemployment' in *Psychological Bulletin* 35 6th June, (1938), p.35

⁵⁶² Ramon Lopez Ortega, 'The Language of the Working Class Novel of the 1930s' in Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.129

⁵⁶³ *ibid*; p.129

⁵⁶⁴ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.67

directed elsewhere, in fact the words which follow the selected quote by Ortega are these: 'Jane hated her fellow beings, her husband included, and hate now tainted her whole being.'⁵⁶⁵

I am very aware that I have made much of the need to know something about the author in order to fully understand what is being said in a novel but surely with Brierley it is essential that a reader is aware of the author's personal alienation and his aspirations and how he views his place in the world. The ordinary working-man is not someone he admires or wishes to emulate, his sights are set elsewhere. And that is not to pass judgment on his aspirations in any way; it is merely to observantly recognise them. Ramon Lopez Ortega selectively quotes in order to make a point but I hardly think that he makes out a case for *Means-Test Man* to be accepted as some kind of realist psychological representation.

Similarly with the surveys conducted at the time. They are undoubtedly accurate in what they record and (in some ways) they arrive at a conclusion which is inevitable. Also, it was a time when there was very little poor-relief and almost no welfare-state and it is absolutely accepted that the pressures from poverty, hunger and insecurity affected the psychology of almost everyone faced with unemployment. However, such reports often mirrored or were influenced-by the reflections of other individuals in the community and it is interesting to note that in evidence to a Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance in 1933, the year when Brierley was preparing his novel for publication, Mrs. Sydney Webb stated:

Most people at some time, and some people at all times, prefer to lounge rather than to work [...] many of them will obviously take to bad practices.⁵⁶⁶

Such sentiments are still expressed regularly on the pages of popular newspapers and

⁵⁶⁵ *ibid*; p.67

⁵⁶⁶ Mrs. Sidney Webb, 'Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance.' *Social Service Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1933, pp. 272–319. www.jstor.org/stable/30010040. (accessed December 11th 2015)

sometimes they are the sincerely held opinions of individuals who would see themselves as 'progressive' or even 'left-leaning' and yet I would strongly suggest that many enlightened readers treat such observations with scepticism.

My own response is clear and needs be stated honestly; I feel that there is a sense of 'falseness' about Brierley's novel, a 'falseness' which raises a question which lies at the core of this chapter; 'to whom should we be true?' By 'we' I mean writers of literature in general but in this instance Brierley who chooses to show the reader a certain 'truth' but one which is, I would maintain, 'false' to many working-class readers who have endured similar experiences. I refer back to the *The Daily Worker* article of May 1935; that the weakness in the novel is 'recognisable perhaps only to those who have experienced long periods of unemployment.'

By concentrating on only the negative aspects and the hatred which emanates from the Cook family the author hides from the reader another 'truth', namely, that in such circumstances many working-people feel it is fair-game to manipulate the System in a manner which may well be viewed by some as dishonest. Examples of this are presented in other novels discussed later, as in for example *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* where such 'manipulations' are described by Philpot and others as 'get[ting] some of our own back'.⁵⁶⁷

It is interesting to note also that the Cooks seldom actually want for anything. The newspapers are delivered, their diet seems more than adequate and they have a substantial and productive garden in which to grow flowers and food and they also, strangely, have savings, savings which have apparently not been disclosed to the means-test inspector. However; this is not dwelt upon by the author and I would suggest that the reason for this is

⁵⁶⁷ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.38

that to cast any shadow over Jack or Jane Cook's integrity would not fit with the author's agenda. The Cooks are presented as 'victims', pure and simple, they flounder like helpless fish-out-of-water with no idea how to and possessed of no desire to, fight back. Whilst their depression and anxiety is understandable it is difficult to comprehend how they can express such hatred and loathing for their own kind who are undergoing similar humiliation and deprivation; neither Jack nor Jane Cook seems capable of any empathic responses towards members of their own community.

The question of 'loyalty' or of identifying those to whom we should be true evolves into a greater question which encompasses the notion of *them* and *us* which in turn causes that very question to adopt a different perspective. If the novel *Means-Test Man* is accurate in the sense that it is an honest portrayal presented without prejudice by the author/narrator, and if the 'hero' Jack Cook is truly alienated from everything; wife, son, unions, one time friends and workers, then who is he? Is he one of *them*? Or is he one of *us*? This especially needs close examination when a further question arises; are the Cook family 'typical' or 'exceptional'? Perhaps further; is the novel actually propaganda presented by an author whose aspirations place him closer to *them* than to *us*? And it needs to be asked whether the author reveals this bias or attempts to conceal it and indeed if he is obliged to reveal it. Would it help the reader to understand more fully where the author is going if the reader knows more about his personal-experience, values and aspirations? Some observations and portrayals by the narrator also raise further queries. There is not, for example, a single description within the novel of Jack Cook venturing out to seek any form of work and yet Bakke, writing at the time, states that 'hunting a job is the "job" of the unemployed worker'.⁵⁶⁸ These questions need to be raised in order to establish whether Brierley's novel holds integrity and thus is accepted in good faith as simply presenting a different perspective, a minority report as it were. Alternatively; is it conscious propaganda which favours *them* and portrays *us* as weak and insipid with no desire whatsoever to seek solutions?

⁵⁶⁸ E. W. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man* (London: Nisbet, 1933), p.129

It may appear that what I am saying is that Brierley's central-characters do not behave as I would like them to behave but that is not the point. My criticism is that the author is presenting the reader with a situation peopled by dubious characters and that insofar as Brierley's novel can be considered to be 'faction' (when considered along the parallels within his own experience and considering Lucas suggestion that: 'The narrow focus of *Means-Test Man* almost makes the Cook family into a case study'⁵⁶⁹ or Holderness's reference to Brierley's 'technique of documentary realism'⁵⁷⁰) then the novel could be read as propaganda for *them*. Whilst propaganda does not always present falsehoods it does, in this novel, present an aspect that appears to have a purpose, a political purpose, in that it presents a view of *us* as being defeated and demoralised totally. There is also something about Jack Cook which tends to disturb this reader in the same manner and for the same reasons that he 'disturbs' Lucas; basically that the central figures lack any kind of character.⁵⁷¹

The tale Brierley presents is of a week in the lives of Jack and Jane Cook. This is a situation which he has close personal experience of. The Cooks live with their four year old son John in a small cottage with a substantial garden and vegetable patch where Jack grows flowers and vegetables of all kinds, there is even an apple tree and all of these 'flourished'.⁵⁷² The means-test has allocated them 'twenty five shillings and threepence a week of which six shillings went on rent'⁵⁷³ at a period in history when the average wages for manual labourers were two pounds ten shillings and sixpence a week⁵⁷⁴ which means the Cooks were living

⁵⁶⁹ John Lucas, 'Walter Brierley and Leslie Williamson'

http://www.pennilesspress.co.uk/prose/walter_brierley.htm (accessed July 3rd 2014), p.5

⁵⁷⁰ Graham Holderness, 'Miners and the Novel: from Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction' in Jeremy Hawthorn (Ed.), *The British Working-Class novel in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p.25

⁵⁷¹ *ibid*; p2

⁵⁷² Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.11

⁵⁷³ *ibid*; p.7

⁵⁷⁴ Robert A. Hart, *Hours and wages in the Depression: British engineering, 1926-1938* Second version (University of Stirling, Department of Economics, April 2001), p.11

on exactly one half of the average worker' income. And yet, with no explanation from the author as to why this should be, they eat well; bacon and sausage for breakfast⁵⁷⁵ and a weekend roast of beef.⁵⁷⁶ Their daily newspaper is paid for and delivered⁵⁷⁷ and they have 'savings' of over £7.00⁵⁷⁸ which according to Hart is equal to more than five weeks income and it is interesting to note that as recently as 2010 Crossley and O'Dea wrote in a UK government document, '25% of the population have wealth levels of less than £200.00'⁵⁷⁹ and that is 25% of *all* the population; working or unemployed, and further; Rice maintains that 'No unemployed married man with a family under the Assistance Board receives enough money to buy adequate food'.⁵⁸⁰ Apparently the latter is not the case in the Cook household.

Compare the Cooks' situation (for example) with the situation of the people who are laid-off from work in Tressell's novel who then virtually starve:

Once when they owed four weeks' rent, the agent was so threatening that they were terrified of being turned out of the house.⁵⁸¹

and again:

Sometimes Mary became so weak and exhausted through worry and lack of proper food that she would break down altogether⁵⁸²

It is recognised that Tressell's novel was set thirty years earlier but it is as well to remember that as recently as 1969 free school meals for children were subject to similar means-

⁵⁷⁵ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.54

⁵⁷⁶ *ibid*; p.54

⁵⁷⁷ *ibid*; p.136

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid*; p.142

⁵⁷⁹ Thomas F. Crossley and Cormac O'Dea, 'The wealth and saving of UK families on the eve of the crisis' in *Purepoint group, Institute for Fiscal Studies* (London 2010), p.11

⁵⁸⁰ M. S. Rice, *Working Class Wives: Their Health and Conditions* (London: Penguin, 1939), p.155

⁵⁸¹ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.340

⁵⁸² *ibid*; p.342

testing⁵⁸³ and about one third of those who should have been given free meals did not in fact get them.⁵⁸⁴ Also, whilst the Cooks' means-tests were inflicted upon them every single month more recently means-test checks have been made only three-monthly but these were also liable to 'emergency checks'. The latter involved 'inspectors' calling unannounced at the individual's home at any time they chose in order that they could check that the individual(s) were not working 'on the side'.⁵⁸⁵ Again I accept that being means-tested in 1934 was different to being means-tested in the late 1960's, however. this knowledge is what shapes my way of reading the text. It is interesting though that Holderness refers to *Means-Test Man* as being a novel whose function is

[...] to display the facts; to tell the truth, from an insider's point-of-view⁵⁸⁶

Holderness further asserts that within the novel

[...] the unemployed occupy a peripheral dimension of extreme deprivation.⁵⁸⁷

As stated the Cooks eat well and have small luxuries but when the enclosed world of the Cooks comes into contact with other working-class and/or unemployed-individuals little is given to the reader which will allow them to know anything of the 'condition' of others in their situation. The Cooks are totally alienated and attempts to involve Jack, as when 'old Humphrey and the chapel secretary Warringham' try to persuade him to return to Sunday-School-teaching, fall flat, and Jack remains 'awkwardly silent' to their pleas.⁵⁸⁸ When pressed he eventually replies, 'I don't feel like comin', I don't feel as if I could mix. I should

⁵⁸³ T. Lynes, 'The Dinner Money Problem' in *Poverty*, No. 10, Spring 1969 Issue, p.13

⁵⁸⁴ M. Meacher, 'Rate Rebates: A Study of the Effectiveness of Means-Tests' in *Poverty Research* Series No. 1, (London: Child Poverty Action Group, 1972), p.22

⁵⁸⁵ Hansard 1972; p.625

⁵⁸⁶ Graham Holderness, 'Miners and the Novel: from Bourgeois to Proletarian Fiction' in Jeremy Hawthorn (Ed.), *The British Working-Class novel in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p.25

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid*; p.26

⁵⁸⁸ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.89

feel outside all the time.⁵⁸⁹ It should be noted that Jack's response is totally self-centred, it is about how he himself feels, Jack is uninterested in the plight of the individuals who are seeking to help him and to offer him companionship and as they continue to implore him the reader is told that within Jack 'the disappointment was thickening into a hate, he felt like saying bitter things, swearing.'⁵⁹⁰

Holderness's observation that these people are portrayed by some kind of empathic author who shows the working-class in conditions of 'extreme deprivation' does not hold up with the description of an encounter Jack Cook has with two other means-tested individuals, Baxter and Kirton, whom he meets when going to 'sign on'. At least one of these two individuals, like Jack Cook, has secret resources which he keeps from the means-test man, Kirton admits; 'Ar've gor a quid a' tew yit' Abert eight'⁵⁹¹ which means he has saved and kept hidden from the means-test man about eight pounds. Hardly supportive of Holderness's 'extreme deprivation' contention. And neither Kirton nor Cook indicate any intent or notion of sharing what they have. So different to Pat the carter in *Strumpet City* who pawns his only pair of boots and walks the streets barefoot in order to help out his comrades during times of hardship and unemployment.⁵⁹²

Of course to show struggle and hardship is not what Brierley wishes to do; he has another agenda. Jack is bursting with anger and shame but it is not directed at the System which has forced him to subjugate himself to the scrutiny of the means-test inspector, instead it is directed at his wife; 'He hated her suddenly, her unintelligent nastiness made him wild'.⁵⁹³ It is for some inexplicable reason aimed at the people manning the admissions table at the

⁵⁸⁹ *ibid*; p.90

⁵⁹⁰ *ibid*; p.91

⁵⁹¹ *ibid*; p.165

⁵⁹² James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.164

⁵⁹³ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.73, with other examples at p.20, p.107, p.109 & p.181

local cricket match, 'Anger, hate, bitterness coursed through him'.⁵⁹⁴ It is even aimed at himself, 'He seemed to become insane for a moment – he could have violated himself; a long slashing gash seemed to think itself into his brain'.⁵⁹⁵ Hatred is even directed at 'Sundays'; 'Wingrove people loved the Sunday tone... Jack Cook hated it'.⁵⁹⁶ It is aimed at Trade Union Officials; 'the trade union officials that he knew, they were a rotten lot'.⁵⁹⁷ Jane, his wife, is filled with similar shame and hatred, indeed between Jack and his wife the most common emotion felt appears to be hatred. The words 'hate' or 'hatred' are repeated frequently throughout the novel until they become a screaming chorus echoing through page after page and always the words stem from Jack or Jane Cook exclusively. Of course it is possible that Brierley is presenting a psychological portrait of a man suffering from a debilitating mental illness; clinical depression, but there seems to be a defeatist component to all this shame and hatred expressed throughout. It seems further that, when a reader is aware of the author's background, that the voice of the author is intervening to express an opinion via the narrator and the central characters, a voice which seeks to guide the reader towards accepting the deleterious conclusion that there is nothing anyone can do, people are helpless in such circumstances. What purports to be a simple description of one single week in the lives of a family who are awaiting the arrival of a man who essentially controls their destiny, the means-test man, becomes a personal and very bitter rant of hatred and despair relating to people caught in a similar trap. More than that it becomes a distortion of a greater reality concentrating instead on a singular perspective which is perhaps, to be fair to the author, simply a minority report.

Another novel which seems to me to be similar in its portrayal of a working-class family is James Hanley's *The Furies*.⁵⁹⁸ It will be my contention that Hanley's novel is anti-working-class insofar as there are no honourable working-people described therein and further that

⁵⁹⁴ *ibid*; p.28

⁵⁹⁵ *ibid*; p.182 with other examples at p.42, p.74 & p.105

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid*; p.68

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid*; p.149

⁵⁹⁸ James Hanley, *The Furies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983)

what other novels reveal as the 'opposition', the *them*, are in fact presented empathetically.

The Furies is a novel with no claims to reflect any specific historical events although several critics have sought to variously opine that it is 'about' the General Strike of 1926⁵⁹⁹ or the Great Liverpool Transport Strike of 1911.⁶⁰⁰ I would suggest that the novel is 'about' neither. Firstly because Hanley's own history would seem to indicate that he had almost no knowledge of strikes as he spent most of his time at sea where small disputes were often settled on board. Secondly, the central theme of the novel is, as the author himself states, a study of a Catholic family concerned more with internal politics and survival of family life than with the outside world and its wider struggle for survival. Hanley himself stated in a letter to his publishers outlining his plan for the novel:

I want to show the downfall of a whole family excepting one, and that is the woman. That woman is heroic, powerful, exercises a tremendous influence over her family. I shall show her under every light. I cannot attempt to describe in detail the amazing lives of these people, sometimes fantastic, but never, never divorced from reality. Working class lives are full of colour, of poetry, there is the stuff of drama in the most insignificant things.⁶⁰¹

If this indeed was Hanley's intent then I would venture to suggest that whether he succeeded or failed in his stated objective he certainly succeeded in presenting the struggles of the working-class as being peripheral, futile and at some levels even absurd. In this sense, and despite the author's stated aims, his novel is quite similar with regard to its pessimism and sense of defeat to Brierley's *Means-Test Man*.

⁵⁹⁹ Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from CHARTISM to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), p.28

⁶⁰⁰ J. Cowper Powys, *Enjoyment of Literature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938), p.76

⁶⁰¹ *ibid*; p.24

The Furies could be seen at one level, as could *Means-Test Man*, to be a simple and detached record of the lives of a working-class family during times of hardship. The Furies are a large Catholic family as opposed to the Cooks in *Means-Test Man* who have but a single child and no extended family. Hanley's narrative also explores wider themes than the intrusion of the *Means-Test Man*. However, *The Furies* is also a testimony to defeatism and pessimism, as Haywood puts it there is throughout a 'pervasive atmosphere of futility and paralysis'.⁶⁰²

The Furies opens with a description of Fanny Fury who is 'a tall woman' aged between 'fifty and sixty years of age' with a mouth that 'seemed hard'.⁶⁰³ Fanny is off to discover the fate of her son Anthony who is a quartermaster on a ship and who has been involved in a fall from the mast. She also has in mind that the Marine Superintendent holds some 'allotment money' which is due to her from Anthony. The author/narrator notes that she feels 'out of place'⁶⁰⁴ and that, for some reason which she cannot identify, she feels 'ashamed'.⁶⁰⁵ This 'shame' pervades in a similar manner to that portrayed by the Cooks in Brierley's novel.

Fanny Fury is the only individual in the family who resorts repeatedly to outright physical violence directed towards members of her own family, beginning very early in the novel when she becomes exasperated at her husband Denny's lack of 'feeling' and strikes him:

She laughed again. Suddenly she turned round and struck him across the mouth with her open hand. The man drew back. He did not speak.⁶⁰⁶

There is no retaliation from Denny Fury; instead he retreats to the pub to escape 'the sound

⁶⁰² Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), p.77

⁶⁰³ James Hanley, *The Furies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.9

⁶⁰⁴ *ibid*; p.10 & p.11

⁶⁰⁵ *ibid*; p.11

⁶⁰⁶ *ibid*; p.24

of that harsh rasping voice.⁶⁰⁷ Various members of the Fury family attribute the conflicts within the family to Fanny and her 'ambition', especially with regard to her aspirations regarding the youngest son Peter. She reacts with feigned bewilderment to the various comments which centre her as responsible for their failings and it is probably true, as Tony Lane argues persuasively, that in this period in time it was the Mother upon whom 'the organisation and management of survival depended [since] teenage boys and men, for their part, could escape to the ships'.⁶⁰⁸ Perhaps it was because she was effectively the head of the family that Fanny was put into a situation where a rod-of-iron rule was necessary.

In view of the author's stated aim to portray this central female figure in detail it is worth pausing a moment to examine Fanny's angry violence and to weigh it against other acts of violence which occur within Hanley's novel. To begin with another incident involving Fanny; she has confronted her sixteen year old son Peter when he returns in disgrace from the seminary in Ireland and is demanding 'the truth' as to why he 'failed'. She glares at him as they sit at the kitchen table and then she grips him with her hands:

His mother drew her chair more closely. She gripped his other arm. Peter gasped. Her hands were like steel. He was imprisoned [...] "Well!" the word shot from her lips. When he did not answer she released one of his arms. Then she struck him with a violent blow in the face.⁶⁰⁹

As this truly horrific scene continues, Peter's mother, between making 'the sign of the cross upon her forehead and lips' berates and abuses the child; 'She would kill him',⁶¹⁰ she calls him a 'beast' and a 'pig'⁶¹¹ and when an answer is not forthcoming 'she spat in his face'.⁶¹² There are reasons of course, if not justifications, for her violence; she has scrimped and

⁶⁰⁷ *ibid*; p.25

⁶⁰⁸ Tony Lane, *Liverpool: Gateway of Empire* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), p.97

⁶⁰⁹ James Hanley, *The Furys* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.102

⁶¹⁰ *ibid*; p.102

⁶¹¹ *ibid*; p.103

⁶¹² *ibid*

saved and fought against the wishes of her other siblings and her husband to have him educated and Peter has, in her eyes, let her down. Nonetheless the violence is excruciating, perhaps even the violence of the sadist. Fanny's violence stands out even when contrasted to the violence of the police,⁶¹³ the rioters who kill a horse with a spike,⁶¹⁴ the army⁶¹⁵ and Mr. Postlethwaite with his knife.⁶¹⁶ Predominant, it has to be emphasised, is Fanny's violence, the violence of an angry woman perpetrated against her own child and her own husband. Fanny's fury at her son continues when he desires to visit his sister in Vulcan Street and when his mother finds out she commands her son:

“Keep away from Vulcan Street” she said, “If I ever find out you have been there I’ll kill you”. She made a sudden rush back and whispered into his face, “I’ll kill you”.⁶¹⁷

The novel ends with Fanny discovering, on the quayside, that her youngest son has been having an affair with her older son Desmond's wife (Sheila) and her response is frightening:

[...] she raised her clenched fists and struck her son between the eyes [...] she struck him again and saw blood run down her son's face. Again she struck, this time with both fists together [...] and she struck not Peter but everybody [...] Again and again she struck, not Peter, not a man, but *all men*, all those who had cheated and insulted her.⁶¹⁸ (my italics)

The violence, our author/narrator informs us, is aimed at ‘all men’. But is this true?

To this reader the author/narrator's intervention to explain Fanny's violence is unconvincing both as a fictional narrative and as some kind of explanation-of the violence. Certainly Fanny Fury's violence disturbs the reader at least as much as does the revelation that her daughter

⁶¹³ *ibid*; p.200

⁶¹⁴ *ibid*; p.202

⁶¹⁵ *ibid*; p.241

⁶¹⁶ *ibid*; p.201

⁶¹⁷ *ibid*; p.168

⁶¹⁸ *ibid*; p.394

Maureen once struck her husband,⁶¹⁹ which is revealed without detail, almost *en passant*. Or the simply stated fact that her son Desmond physically attacked a mounted-policeman 'and knocked all his teeth out',⁶²⁰ which is reported second-hand by the son of their neighbour. And yet the latter, in the context of this thesis, would seem to be a justifiable reaction of *us* to *them* at some level whilst the violence of Fanny seems cruel, disturbing, denigrating almost sadistic. And as we shall see later, 'sadism' is something which the author is very interested in.

This is Fanny Fury then, the individual whom the author has stated he wishes to show as 'heroic, powerful'; a woman not averse to stealing her own husband's life savings⁶²¹ and to bearing long term grudges against her own son and daughter for what could be labelled petty reasons. She does not come across, despite what the author/narrator informs us, as a woman sorely put upon by 'men'. The author may well have the intent of feeding into his novel a sense of the matriarch-dominated family wherein the matriarch herself is fighting bravely against an army of evil men; however, to simply place this 'opinion' in the mind of the reader via a narrator on the final page of a three hundred and ninety five page novel whilst failing to provide any evidence within the rest of the novel for this narrator's assumptive statement, does not strike this reader as being terribly convincing. The text itself, as opposed to what a reader is directed to think by the author/narrator, is at variance with this comment and when this single individual, Fanny Fury, behaves for a large part of the time in a despicable manner inflicting her anger and terrible violence upon her son while stealing from her family, then this reader seeks for an ulterior motive on the part of the author.

The Furys' family consists of a deceased son John who was 'crushed to death at twenty years of age',⁶²² Anthony, 'the simpleton of the family'⁶²³ whom we never meet but who is

⁶¹⁹ *ibid*; p.322

⁶²⁰ *ibid*; p.221

⁶²¹ *ibid*; p.222

⁶²² *ibid*; p.96

lying in a hospital bed in America following an accident on board his ship, Maureen who has married out of her religion to a man who is 'old enough to be the girl's father',⁶²⁴ and Desmond who is married to the strange and ethereal Sheila who in her turn is portrayed as a 'common prostitute'⁶²⁵ or alternatively as some mythical siren who sits by the sea perhaps luring sailors:

Who was she? He didn't want to know. Where did she go every night, and why did she always sit by herself on the shore? He didn't know, and he didn't care.⁶²⁶

The boy making the latter observation is the youngest member of the Fury family, Peter, who was sent away at an early age to train for the priesthood and who returns in disgrace for having 'done that filthy thing',⁶²⁷ which, it transpires, is a euphemism for having visited a brothel. There is also Fanny's sister Brigid who arrives from Ireland as escort to the disgraced Peter. Fanny's Father also lives with Fanny and Denny, a symbolic 'cross' which Fanny bears with Catholic endurance literally carrying him everywhere⁶²⁸ following his debilitating stroke which necessitates that every time she leaves the house he must be strapped into a chair⁶²⁹ or hoisted upon Fanny's back or draped between her and her husband to be transported to their destination which is usually the post office to collect his weekly pension.⁶³⁰

This extended family then constitutes the Fury family. They live in a city called Gelton not too dissimilar to Liverpool, in fact many commentators now simply refer to the setting as being in Liverpool, as for example a note by Patrick Williams in his essay 'No Struggle but the Home'

⁶²³ *ibid*; p.62

⁶²⁴ *ibid*; p.116

⁶²⁵ *ibid*; p.88

⁶²⁶ *ibid*; p.365

⁶²⁷ *ibid*; p.124

⁶²⁸ *ibid*; p.36

⁶²⁹ *ibid*; p.14

⁶³⁰ *ibid*; p.65

indicates; 'Gelton (Hanley's fictionalised Liverpool)'.⁶³¹ The Fury home lies in the shadow of a bone-factory whose stench invades everything and everywhere. Father (Denny) is an ex-stoker on ships and now works on the railways, an exact parallel with the author's own life. A strike is imminent although apparently no one has much commitment to it except Desmond, whose motives for his political allegiance are described by the narrator as being distinctly suspect. His father opines of his son Desmond when it is noted that the miners are about to strike:

They say he's coming out on strike with the loco-men. How true it is I don't know. Strikes give me the pip.⁶³²

That 'Strikes give me the pip' is telling for the strike remains almost incidental throughout the novel although there are several descriptions of police, specials and even troops clashing with strikers. When the latter happens though the general focus of the novel is to insinuate that the cause of the unrest is the strikers not the mounted police or the army:

A crowd was a curious thing [...] *a headless monster* [...] Somebody had hurled a brick [...] this *angry mob* [...] A veritable shower of stones was hurled at the hotel window.' And *the calm response* of the police to this *stone-throwing rabble* is to raise a megaphone and shout; 'Clear the square! Clear the square!'⁶³³ (my italics)

Some peculiar phrases are conjured by the author to describe the opposing groups; the 'crowd' is a 'headless monster', they are a 'rabble' whilst the 'police' are 'calm' and their horses do not charge they advance at a 'gentle trot'.⁶³⁴ Nonetheless police brutality during the strike is evident but always tempered as when the Furys' neighbour, Mr. Postlethwaite, responds to a mounted-policeman knocking down a woman: 'he put his hand in his pocket

⁶³¹ Patrick Williams, 'No Struggle but the Home' in michael murphy and deryn rees-jones (Eds.), *writing liverpool essays and interviews* (Liverpool: University Press, 2007), p.46

⁶³² James Hanley, *The Furys* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.38

⁶³³ *ibid*; p.199

⁶³⁴ *ibid*; p.200

and drew out his clasp-knife',⁶³⁵ his intent though being not to attack the officer but to slit the horse's throat. The violence of Mr. Postlethwaite comes across as being at least as indefensible as that of the mounted-policeman and is in keeping with the nature of the mob as described by the mysterious and intriguing Professor Titmouse in a scene which will be discussed in detail later.

There is a scenario here then where, in Brierley's novel, a reader views a small nuclear family under pressure because of the imminent arrival of the means-test man, where the litany throughout is a song of hatred sung by the central characters. In Hanley's novel a larger extended family is under pressure through a lack of money and the pressures brought about within that family by a younger son who is perceived of as a 'failure' and others who have 'betrayed' the family by marrying into a different religion or by transgressing in some way which the dictatorial Fanny disapproves of. This too is a working-class family. The family is labelled with the angry name of the Furys and the heroine aims her own violence and vitriolic anger exclusively at her own family. In neither novel is the central focus on the hows-and-whys of the politics of their situations, it is the immediacy of personal feelings and the family itself as a unit that are central for both Brierley and Hanley and each presents a picture of families isolated, not concerned with politics, filled with impotent anger and hatred for their fellow men or/and family; ultimately defeated and demoralised. The only *them* which are identified for the most part are the *them* which constitute their own kind; neighbours, family, workmates.

Before I continue with my analysis of *The Furys* and in order to progress my contention that these two novels offer a totally different view of *them* and *us* than that presented in other working-class novels, we need to first identify their similarities in terms of their presentation of situations which are in some way comparable to those existing in other novels discussed herein. More importantly I would like to identify and speculate upon the areas wherein these

⁶³⁵ *ibid*; p.201

novels differ one from the other and where the *voices* differ from other novels and so must return briefly to *Means-Test Man* and to suggest that both novels present a peculiar and alienating hatred.

In the very first paragraph of *Means-Test Man*, relaying an account of the first of seven days leading up to the monthly visit of the means-test man, a reader is presented with an image of Jack Cook rising from his bed and 'struggling against an impatience tinged with hate and anger.'⁶³⁶ Later in the same opening paragraph the reader is informed that 'the attitude of mind must continue, the impatience, the anger, the hate, the concrete unhappiness.'⁶³⁷ The negativity is hurled at the reader in a storm of words in the very first brief paragraph: 'agony', 'dreaded', 'killed', 'helpless', 'suffer', 'pointless', 'hopeless', 'death', 'fire', 'impatience', 'anger', 'hate', 'unhappiness' and many of these words are repeated. In the opening chapter the reader witnesses Jack attending a cricket match where he, being 'Wholly Unemployed', is charged a penny to enter: 'Anger, hate, bitterness coursed through him, he burned with a kind of shame',⁶³⁸ and when the narrator turns from Jack to his wife Jane she is shown shopping and being content that she has not encountered her neighbours Mrs. Cullen and Mrs. Corkhill. The reader is told the reason; 'Jane hated them.'⁶³⁹ It transpires also that her hatred is petty, it is because they 'shout about' waiting until near closing time to visit the butcher or the fishmonger when the remaining items are cheaper. Yet this does not prevent Jane from referring to Mrs. Corkhill, in typical vicious language, as a 'loud-mouthed, brainless slut.'⁶⁴⁰ It is a language as violent and aggressive as that which Fanny Fury uses when she is berating her son as a 'pig' and a 'beast'.⁶⁴¹ Still continuing with her shopping Jane Cook sees a dress in a shop window which initially delights her until she sees the price; 'eighteen and eleven pence' which incurs her wrath and hatred yet again: 'The anger faintly

⁶³⁶ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.3

⁶³⁷ *ibid*; pp.3-4

⁶³⁸ *ibid*; p.28

⁶³⁹ *ibid*; p.52

⁶⁴⁰ *ibid*; p.48

⁶⁴¹ James Hanley, *The Furys* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.103

tinged by hate, which had sat with her all night, surged suddenly to a greater intensity.⁶⁴² It thus rapidly unfolds that both she and her husband had awoken that morning with a general and only vaguely defined but virulent hatred in their hearts, and that this hatred is not directed at the System nor even directly at the inevitable arrival of the means-test man, instead it is aimed at their neighbours, their fellow-workers and at each other.

Oddly though, between the actuality of Jack's initial hatred and the revelation of his wife's, the reader is not 'shown' by the narrator a situation which would in any way justify or even hint at a reason for such hatred except for the monotonous and suffocating passage of time which shall be discussed later. Instead the reader is told that when he rose Jack was aware of an almost idyllic day, on a

warm, bright morning where the birds were noisily busy about the garden, among the potatoes, on the pea row, in the one apple tree.⁶⁴³

The flower patch in their garden grows

pansies and catmint, tall poppies, taller marguerites, small clouds of forget-me-nots and London pride, two full-bloomed rose trees⁶⁴⁴

In addition to the previously mentioned vegetables Jack grows

carrot, parsnip, beet, lettuce, radish [and all are] orderly flourishing⁶⁴⁵

Further the Cooks breakfast on 'thin sliced bread, margarine, fresh eggs, sugar and milk'⁶⁴⁶ and the reader is told that on Sundays they have bacon and sausage with their morning egg

⁶⁴² Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.55

⁶⁴³ *ibid*; p.9

⁶⁴⁴ *ibid*; p.10

⁶⁴⁵ *ibid*; p.11

⁶⁴⁶ *ibid*; p.12

followed by a roast dinner,⁶⁴⁷ and thus their continued anger and hatred, as described by the narrator, seems initially to be somewhat unfounded; the text indicates one thing while the narrator informs us of another. Even if taken as a literary device this technique of hiding the reasons why they are behaving and feeling as they do is a two-edged sword; on the one hand it may stimulate the reader's curiosity but on the other hand it feels almost as if the furious negativity is directed towards the reader, hammering him or her like a verbal hailstorm and thus any empathy that might be expected to emerge when being shown the focus of this storm is lost under the sheer force of the Cooks' hatred and anger.

The means-test man casts the shadow of his impending visit across this family causing blight and perhaps provoking their hatred of neighbours and their inability to appreciate the beauty all around them. Yet the reader is aware that it is either Jack, or perhaps Jane, who has lovingly tended the flowers and cultivated the vegetables and not only do the Cook family never experience hunger, they are able to save⁶⁴⁸ and to have a daily newspaper delivered.⁶⁴⁹

It is difficult for this reader to empathise with them. It is not as if the means-test man is symbolic of the System, no such suggestion is ever indicated; it is an individual who 'rapes' them and leaves them exposed and produces such defeatist despair as this:

He [Jack] was as helpless against life as he was against death; life came to them just as it would, death would do the same.⁶⁵⁰

This is the voice of the narrator (or/and the author) informing the reader that Jack is 'helpless'; note that the narrator does not say he *feels* helpless; no, he *was* helpless. The observation seems to me to be a political one; the author/narrator is guiding the reader by

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.54

⁶⁴⁸ *ibid*; p.137

⁶⁴⁹ *ibid*; p.136

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid*; p.266

effectively stating that there is nothing anyone can do in these circumstances.

To return to this 'rape' which I commented upon above, this refers to the pseudo-sexual descriptions invoked by the presence of the means-test man, 'And every month he was to be probed and prodded. Jane was to be probed and prodded'⁶⁵¹ and 'She (Jane) felt sick, full or misery and shame, as if she were standing naked',⁶⁵² This is evocative and powerfully stated by the author/narrator and yet it fails to evoke an empathic reader-response, perhaps because the whole attitude of the Cook family is defeatist from the start and their thinking, when they do manage to throw aside their hatred to find time to think, is irrational. There is nothing in the style or presentation either which suggests that there is a greater act of 'rape', one inflicted upon all of those other individuals living in poverty, instead it is presented as a single and individual act, as being personal and private to the Cook family.

This is the same Cook family who cannot see further than their own plight at any time in the novel and who usually offer a distorted or even false perspective. Expressed, for example, when Jane opines at one point:

[...] women and children were starving, and men too; yet nobody did anything [...] Humans suffered, yet they did nothing to change the construction of the world.⁶⁵³

The imprecise reference to 'they' is not, I would advocate, any recognition of the *them* of this thesis, it is simply another vague display of the hatred expressed continuously throughout the novel. There were thousands of humans who at the time in which the novel is set *were* working together to protest the means-test,⁶⁵⁴ and there were powerful women who were winning the vote and making their voices heard. Thus Jane's 'ignorance' raises little

⁶⁵¹ *ibid*; p.243

⁶⁵² *ibid*; p.261

⁶⁵³ *ibid*; p.67

⁶⁵⁴ Stephanie Ward, *The Means Test and Protest in 1930's South Wales and North-East England* (Manchester, University Press, 2013), pp.292-297

empathy, all that is felt is frustration at the Cooks who are presented by the author/narrator as not only selfishly divorcing themselves from the struggle but even denying that such a struggle exists. Of course one understands the sociological and psychological pressures which could possibly lead to Jane's thinking, however, it is the author's decision to draw the reader's attention to this negative language, to make it the central focus of this novel, and I would maintain that the result of Brierley's emphasis is to reinforce the futility of following any positive trains of thought. Despite the fact that, at the time of Brierley's writing, Sylvia Pankhurst had written a much debated 'feminist' book⁶⁵⁵ and Trades Unions were deeply engaged along with others in the National Council of Labour Colleges versus the Workers Educational Association debate.⁶⁵⁶ The National Unemployed Workers' Movement which was active at the time had at number one on its list of objectives; '1. Abolition of the Means-Test'.⁶⁵⁷ However, the author of *Means-Test Man* at all times chooses the focal point of his novel and Brierley chooses to focus on the Cook's never-ending tirade of hatred directed only against their own friends, themselves and their class.

There is a core of violence too within Brierley's novel but it is not direct and physical as in the Fury family. The violence in *Means-Test Man* is directed inwardly to thoughts of self-harm. Thus suicide and thoughts of suicide surface and one hearkens back to Hunter in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* who when driven to despair cuts his own throat,⁶⁵⁸ or the Cardi family in Lewis Jones' novels who, when times get hard for them they too commit suicide.⁶⁵⁹ However, the central characters in Brierley's novel mull over their thoughts in a manner which is uncomfortably self-pitying:

⁶⁵⁵ Sylvia E. Pankhurst. *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1931)

⁶⁵⁶ Anthony B. Carew, *Labour Under the Marshall Plan: The Politics of Productivity and the Marketing of Management Science* (Manchester: University Press, 1987), p.202

⁶⁵⁷ Working Class Movement Library, *National Unemployed Workers Movement*.
<http://www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/protest-politics-and-campaigning-for-change/unemployment/national-unemployed-workers-movement/> (accessed June 17th 2015)

⁶⁵⁸ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.613

⁶⁵⁹ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.620

[...] frightened by visions of the river, the canal, the reservoir; sometimes seeing an awful significance in the strong arm of a tree, the hook in the ceiling, the razor.⁶⁶⁰

The very earth seems charged with a self-destructive menace which is patently out of their control:

The earth appeared to be waiting, holding its breath before some imminent violence.⁶⁶¹

Like Fanny Fury, Jane Cook is capable of inflicting bitter pain with her words causing Jack to think of suicide:

[...] his wife's sharp words and bitter outbursts hardened him against her [but] he wouldn't have liked her to sit moping all day [...] he might have killed himself then.⁶⁶²

Thus the 'enemies' of the Cooks are not the traditional 'enemies' of the working-class as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, they are not the 'enemies', the *them*, portrayed by Tressell, Grassie Gibbon, Holdsworth, Plunkett, or Lewis Jones. No; the Cooks' hatred is not directed against the System, the church, the police and the armed forces but instead it is reserved for their neighbours, their fellow workers and ultimately for themselves.

Each chapter of *Means-Test Man* has a day of the week as its title beginning on a Saturday. The interrogation, the virtual 'rape' by the means-test man will take place the following Saturday, thus 'time' hangs heavy and there is a monotonous though menacing throb throughout as the day, the hour, the moment approaches. Meaningful time is the 'possession' of *them*. Time for the Cooks is interspersed with depressive thoughts of suicide

⁶⁶⁰ Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.131

⁶⁶¹ *ibid*; p.119

⁶⁶² *ibid*; p.42

or murder⁶⁶³ or of the irrational and misdirected hatred which abides within each of them, or of thoughts of 'scabbing'.⁶⁶⁴ It is 'time' wherein Jack feels himself 'apart from the world, a man not whole. Cornered. Hemmed in where not even God can get near me.'⁶⁶⁵ And yet nothing ever gets *done*; the time has almost no relevance except in its being there and passing-by.

Similarly in *The Furies*, 'time' is mentioned throughout and usually with a kind of fear attached to it; the phrase 'How late it was' is repeated often.⁶⁶⁶ The novel centres on a strike and in parts it brings together the various conceptions of historical time within an important, almost epic, present. Despite the fact that Hanley seeks to centre the family and to downstage the strike it is the latter which flows both backwards into 'historical inversion' and forwards 'along the historically productive horizontal'⁶⁶⁷ in an apparent contradiction which disjoints Hanley's novel.

'Time' itself however, in its current present and concrete form, is an enemy of the Furies, it mocks them:

Mr. Fury looked up at the clock he felt certain that its face had grinned at him. So sure was he that he got up and turned its face to the wall.⁶⁶⁸

Throughout Hanley's novel the central characters are continuously consulting the clock because much of their life is governed by time; the men who work have to 'clock on' and 'clock off',⁶⁶⁹ the alarm must be set each night before they retire and it wakens them 'rudely'

⁶⁶³ *ibid*; p.73

⁶⁶⁴ *ibid*; p.87

⁶⁶⁵ *ibid*; p.91

⁶⁶⁶ James Hanley, *The Furies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.11

⁶⁶⁷ Michael Holquist (Ed.), trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp.48-57

⁶⁶⁸ James Hanley, *The Furies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.387

⁶⁶⁹ *ibid*; p.48

each morning⁶⁷⁰ and for Denny Fury even retiring to bed meant clock-watching; 'Mr. Fury would watch the clock. He hated retiring.'⁶⁷¹ Perhaps this is why Denny Fury longs to go back to a life at sea where time is not so dominant. Indeed right at the end of this lengthy novel he recognises the hold which 'time' has had on him and its connection with the comparative freedom of life at sea:

He was thinking of Mulcare's words; "Your time's finished, Fury." Yes, no doubt about it, his time was finished [...] he had had his last bout with the sea.⁶⁷²

'Time' it seems, for working-men, is an enemy, it is in the *them* camp in the sense that it is surely *them*, as opposed to *us*, who control and manipulate 'time' as it relates to working-class individuals.

However, the reason why 'time' is so important in these particular novels is, I would suggest, to emphasise the futility of the lives of the people who are central; they are either out of work and ashamed of their situation like the Cook family, or, like Fanny Fury, they are wrapped up in the internal politics of 'family life' and totally uninterested or even hostile to what is going on around them. Working people tied to unsatisfactory employment or to no employment at all are ruled in one way or another by the clock but there is no sense of either the Cooks or the Furys having any desire to take control of their own time; they are each presented as being, in one way or another as victims and/or as powerless.

In the case of Brierley it seems possible also that his own personal experience of alienation may have made him antagonistic to his fellow manual-workers, since he after all had higher aspirations. He writes about what he knows, about his personal experiences of how he felt when waiting for the monthly cycle of a means-test inspector's arrival coupled with the belief

⁶⁷⁰ *ibid*; p.22

⁶⁷¹ *ibid*; p.31

⁶⁷² *ibid*; p.391

that even his fellow workers were against him. Similarly perhaps with Hanley who, as a seaman, would have lived for long periods on board ship and thus in an isolated world with little experience of strikes and of solidarity within the Unions. Thus Hanley too writes about that which he recalls; the matriarch-dominated Catholic family and its internal concerns.

At one level there is a truism which holds that a writer should write about that which s/he knows best and I would like, with this in mind, to discuss, perhaps especially with regard to Hanley's novel, the extent to which the author/narrator is delivering to the reader a message which clearly could categorise him as being empathic toward *them*, or at the very least inclining in that direction. If that sounds too critical then let me put it another way; I feel, when reading these two novels, that what I am reading is alien to the point of being 'myth' and as Barthe indicated; the mythologist

[...] greatly doubts that tomorrow's truths will be the exact reverse of today's lies [...] For him tomorrow's positivity is entirely hidden by today's negativity. All the values of his undertaking appear to him as acts of destruction.⁶⁷³

Both Brierley and Hanley, I contend, are constructing myths whose purpose, in part at least, is to negate and denigrate the working-class, the class from which each of these authors sought to escape.

The question I shall raise is provocative and can be further refined into a series of direct questions; are Hanley and Brierley anti working-class and/or anti working-class-endavours? Do they advocate, emphasise and even elevate, as Patrick Williams suggests about *The Furies*; 'Exaggerated, even callous individualism.'⁶⁷⁴ Do these two novels reflect a kind of truth which is perhaps difficult for the majority of *us* to absorb and are they guilty of feeding

⁶⁷³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Random House, 1993), p.157

⁶⁷⁴ Patrick Williams, 'No Struggle but the Home' in michael murphy and deryn rees-jones (Eds.), *Writing Liverpool Essays and Interviews*, (Liverpool: University Press, 2007), p.47

despair or minority-perspectives about the working-classes to a perceived audience? To be blunt, are Brierley and Hanley presenting what many working-class readers would interpret as anti-working-class propaganda?

There may be a clue to this in a most peculiar character who surfaces in *The Furys*. He is almost a surreal figure, a character bathed in a kind of magic-realism which initially seems out of place within the novel but which perhaps is in tune with Lukacs' assertion that working-class consciousness can reveal an ability to 'grasp the material substratum of irrationality which lies beyond the limitations of a bourgeois cultural horizon.'⁶⁷⁵ Thus while Hanley's central characters are, in general, automatic in their responses and seem only to be living 'the struggle' in an abstract manner (as opposed to Brierley's Cook family who are presented by the author as being totally defeated 'objects'), the character of Professor Titmouse in *The Furys* conveys, at least partially, that irrational, yet opinionated and challenging voice which otherwise only intrudes tentatively. I suggest that what is whispered by the narrator/author throughout this novel is bellowed loudly by Titmouse who otherwise has no function whatsoever as part of the story of the Fury family.

Ralph Wright in a *Daily Worker* review of *The Furys* opines that, 'he [Hanley] allows not one scrap of direct propaganda to invade his novels',⁶⁷⁶ but I beg to disagree. I suggest that, at some level, the voice of Titmouse is the voice of the author and further that it is a voice seeking to enunciate anti-working-class propaganda. At other times in the novel I identify the voices of the author speaking also, it is almost always as an aside and is frequently petty yet opinionated thus it is fruitful to examine all the voices of the narrator/author.

Desmond Fury is the single 'socialist' in the Fury family, although his motives, we are informed by the narrator, are suspect. He is a large man capable of knocking the teeth from

⁶⁷⁵ Georg Lukács, *Solzhenitsyn* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1971), p.91

⁶⁷⁶ Ralph Wright *The Daily Worker*, December 1935

a police-officer and his marriage to the mystical Sheila is based on his total worship of her. At one point in the novel she is about to leave him as she often does to go 'out' and he dips his finger into a powder-smear left by his wife, as he does so the narrator opines; 'There was something repulsive about the huge man dipping his finger in the powder and smelling it.'⁶⁷⁷ I find this a peculiar comment. I find myself asking if the intervention is made to further emphasise that this 'fake' socialist is something 'other'? Something less than a man? What is it that the author/narrator finds 'repulsive' about a man smelling scented powder? Is he perhaps hinting that the Socialist, the only one in the novel, is effeminate? And a few pages further on occurs a description of an outdoor meeting during a strike when a police-officer pushes his way through the crowd and the crowd resent this. The narrator however intervenes to inform the reader that; 'It wasn't authority that was being questioned by the crowd, but the manners of authority.'⁶⁷⁸ I would however suggest, without hesitation, that the presence of police-officers in crowds at strike-meetings or picket-lines and their presumption of authority is exactly what people would object to and that the mood of strikers demonstrating is generally anti-authority; 'manners' is hardly a consideration. The way police behave on picket line duty is described repeatedly by miners from Orgreave in 1984 to women pickets active at Grunwick in 1976 and is always comparable, for example: 'The police began to come to the demonstrations in large numbers and there were reports that the police were violent towards people who were protesting. The press covered these events - but they mostly took the side of the police.'⁶⁷⁹ I ask rhetorically; is it likely that the strikers feel that the 'manners of authority' are of prime concern?

The invitation to accept the narrator's explanations seems again to be portraying a peculiarly middle-class perception, or a Richards/Leavis-type directing of the reader towards an

⁶⁷⁷ James Hanley, *The Furies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.184

⁶⁷⁸ *ibid*; p.197

⁶⁷⁹ Dr. Sundari Anitha & Professor Ruth Pearson 2013 as part of a follow on project 'Striking Women: South Asian workers' struggles in the UK labour market from Grunwick to Gate Gourmet' at <http://www.striking-women.org/module/striking-out/grunwick-dispute> online commentary (accessed October 7th 2015)

'expert' interpretation or even a way of explaining something which either Hanley does not fully understand or which he feels the reader does not understand. It is difficult also not to suspect that the observation that it is somehow unmanly to smell scented powder reveals something about the author/narrator which is so delicate that it can only be hinted at.

As already observed Desmond is the only declared Socialist in the novel and it is telling that the author chooses to paint him as having ulterior motives for his beliefs:

This strike was his [Desmond's] opportunity, it might not come again. 'Yes and Vulcan Street can go to hell. For all I care. Vulcan Street can sink into the earth.' He had served his apprenticeship. Others could pick up plums. Why should not he?⁶⁸⁰

Thus the only Socialist in the book is a self-seeker and the most obvious self-seeker in the book is a Socialist and further his behaviour at a very basic level is 'repulsive' (for reasons obscure) to the author/narrator. Given this 'evidence' may a reader not honestly arrive at the conclusion that Hanley is prejudiced against the aspirations and beliefs of working-people? Or even that he is writing not to present a balance or to advance proletariat-literature but is instead relating the case for *them*? I ask this because I believe that if the only person in the book who adopts socialist principles is portrayed as a self-seeker who actually does not really believe in the socialism he preaches, then it seems fair to conclude that the author has an agenda which does not relate to working-class aspirations and which in fact denigrates them.

To return to Professor Titmouse and to the question of his 'voice' or opinions and where they originate from. Hanley's editor at Chatto and Windus believed Titmouse to be irrelevant to the whole story of the Furys. Nicola Wilson draws attention to an exchange of letters between Hanley and his editor Henry Raymond. Raymond was clearly unimpressed with the

⁶⁸⁰ *ibid*; p.336

character of Titmouse and he wrote to Hanley suggesting that the character be removed completely, adding

[Titmouse] seems out of keeping with the rest of the book, too grotesque and fantastic. (CWA; 11th July 1934)⁶⁸¹

Hanley however was equally adamant that the character must remain *explaining* his train of thought in a written response just one week later:

[Titmouse's] phantasmagorical appearance and vanishing gives that chapter the very queerness I wished to give it. Moreover the very scenes in that chapter in my mind gave a sort of spectral atmosphere, an identical one for such a man. At the same time it does not follow that this character should not reveal himself later on in flesh and blood. But if he appears like that in this volume then the queerness I aim at in that chapter is lost [...] it is enough that he enter and disappear in that queer way. (CWA 18th July 1934)⁶⁸²

Edward Stokes observes that 'through his [Titmouse's] lunatic rhetoric is somewhat equivocally conveyed what one assumes to be Hanley's own view.'⁶⁸³ When considering this alleged 'lunatic rhetoric' it is as well to recall that James Agate labelled Hanley's use of language as 'bogus'⁶⁸⁴ and that *The Liverpool Echo* in an anonymous commentary queried that the language used even made sense to ordinary people enquiring whether or not 'several years of authorship destroyed Mr. Hanley's sense of how people really talk.'⁶⁸⁵

Whether or not the language is overblown and hyperbolic a reader needs to consider why it should be that Hanley would chose to voice his own views (if they *are* his own views; and we

⁶⁸¹ Nicola Wilson, 'Archive Fever: The Publishers' Archive and the History of the Novel' in Patrick Parrinder, Andrew Nash and Nicola Wilson (Eds.), *New Directions in the History of the Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.82

⁶⁸² *ibid*; p.82

⁶⁸³ Edward Stokes, *The Novels of James Hanley* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1964), p.47

⁶⁸⁴ James Agate, *The Daily Express*; February 7th 1935

⁶⁸⁵ John Fordham, 'James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class' PhD submission to Middlesex University 1997 p180 quoting *The Liverpool Echo*; February 13th 1935

should perhaps keep in mind Pamuk's notion of 'meta literature'⁶⁸⁶ here as referred to in Chapter seven previously) via a pantomime villain like Titmouse. Perhaps his contorted, centre-stage status lends this 'professor of anthropology' some form of authority as when Titmouse assumes almost the figure of Satan tempting Christ⁶⁸⁷ as he sits the boy Peter on the stone lion's back and displays the world for him to see; they sit, quite literally, above the rest of the world. The description of Titmouse's physical appearance also is almost absurdly surreal as he 'stood over six feet in height and was almost as broad as he was long'.⁶⁸⁸ When he accosts Peter the boy notices as they walk together that besides his distinctly peculiar mode of dress he has 'a hairy chest [...and] down the right side of his face the man had a long scar'.⁶⁸⁹ Even as they converse the thought occurs to Peter that he is 'walking in a dream'.⁶⁹⁰ When the professor 'spits violently into the road' his mouth makes 'fantastic movements' and he, in a manner which suggests an evil spirit being exorcised, 'expels mucous matter from his throat'.⁶⁹¹ Titmouse also displays a scathing contempt for the strikers by referring to the people protesting on the streets as 'rats'.⁶⁹²

There is also about this character an air of sexual depravity; a voice in the street shouts after him the word 'Brownie'⁶⁹³ as he encourages young Peter to come with him, Titmouse catches Peter's leg and squeezes it stating that if the boy stands erect he will 'hold your legs'⁶⁹⁴ and he tells the boy; 'I rather like you, I experience the most extraordinary feelings in your company.' Titmouse seems to kiss Peter or at least to try to; 'his protruding lips appeared to touch Peter's face' as he implores the boy to 'Close your eyes'.⁶⁹⁵ The professor's words and actions are charged with sexual innuendo: 'Look, the light from the

⁶⁸⁶ Orhan Pamuk, *The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist: Understanding What Happens When We Write and Read Novels* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), p.36

⁶⁸⁷ King James' Bible; *Luke 4:5*

⁶⁸⁸ James Hanley, *The Furys* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.237

⁶⁸⁹ *ibid*; p.238

⁶⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁶⁹¹ *ibid*; p.239

⁶⁹² *ibid*; p.240

⁶⁹³ Chambers Slang Dictionary 2008: A word deriving from a slang term for a homosexual; a 'brown-hatter'

⁶⁹⁴ *ibid*; p.247

⁶⁹⁵ *ibid*; p.249

fires has caught them. Goblins⁶⁹⁶ from the inferno! Ha ha!⁶⁹⁷ The reader is then informed that

The professor suddenly gripped Peter's body and embraced him. The boy struggled [...] They held together for a moment, then the boy lunged and broke free.⁶⁹⁸

Peter is nauseated by the man's attentions and the reader is informed:

When he thought of the mad professor his blood ran cold. There was something about the man's figure, the touch of his hand, his almost pesty breath, that made Peter shudder.⁶⁹⁹

Titmouse becomes more horrific and more surreal as the scene continues:

He could see his huge rotten teeth again as the man opened his mouth to emit that slow strange croak. A human toad.⁷⁰⁰

Eventually the professor is felled by a police-baton and lost in the crowd but not before leaving his calling-card with Peter. Peter then meets up with his brother Desmond whom he has not seen for years. The reader is told that, following the night of rioting, Peter had 'a nightmare in which he had been riding pick-a-back with Professor Titmouse round and round Powell Square'⁷⁰¹

The professor's presence is surreal and frightening in other ways; it has been seen that he describes the crowd as 'a headless monster' and the people as 'rats' and 'goblins' and he rides the stone lions in the square like some beast from hell who is almost directing the

⁶⁹⁶ Chambers Slang Dictionary 2008: A word which when used as a slang term refers to someone who 'gobbles' or performs an act of fellatio on another individual

⁶⁹⁷ James Hanley, *The Furys* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.249

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid*; pp.249-50

⁶⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.250

⁷⁰⁰ *ibid*; p.252

⁷⁰¹ *ibid*; p.255

scenario as the police read the riot act and then charge the crowds. And yet the voice of the professor and the voice of the narrator become intermingled and it is not always possible to separate the two. This reader recalls the author/narrator being 'repulsed' by a working man smelling scented powder, here again in this remarkable scene it is again surfacing almost as a whisper that the author has something to say which he realises may be unpalatable. A reader may enquire for example exactly who it is that observes that 'Individual acts of terrorism were taking place daily, day and night.'⁷⁰² Is that the voice of this maniacal professor or of the narrator or is it the voice of an author who is also terrorised by the notion of strikes and riots? It is ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so, because the author recognises that his personal perspective may well alienate readers. And there is that consistent hint that the 'crowd' is in some way solely responsible for the riots and the mayhem as when the professor urges Peter:

Look at the child. She is crying. She is being crushed. Her mother holds her to her breast, but she is being crushed by the crowd. What right has that woman to bring her child here?⁷⁰³

It is the professor who voices the belief that, 'A crowd has no focal point, for the simple reason that it has no head. It has only a body',⁷⁰⁴ and it is he who, when he witnesses a man looting a suit from a shop, states; 'The little man has new-clothed himself at the expense of some poor shopkeeper. But is that honest?'⁷⁰⁵ It is also the professor who continually questions the 'morality' of the crowd and who observes, and is apparently disgusted by, its 'blind strength, its dull rage, its very breath, the multifarious smells that arise from their bodies.'⁷⁰⁶ However; and this is an important perspective to hold uppermost, it is Hanley, the author, who has created this child-lusting, striker-hating monster who has no purpose, this scene which is arguably totally unnecessary, and it is Hanley who has placed words into this

⁷⁰² *ibid*; p.241

⁷⁰³ *ibid*; p.244

⁷⁰⁴ *ibid*; p.244

⁷⁰⁵ *ibid*; p.245

⁷⁰⁶ *ibid*; p.246

character's mouth which are perhaps, from many perspectives, distasteful.

I would contend that the professor has no place within this novel other than as a voice to pass comment and direction upon that which we witness as readers. Hanley's own defence to his editor seems less like a literary response than an equivocal justification. If the detail of the letter Hanley sent to his editor (which was referred to earlier⁷⁰⁷) is examined, a reader must surely be struck by its vagueness. Hanley responds with; 'his [Titmouse's] phantasmagorical appearance and vanishing gives that chapter the very queerness I wished to give it.' And yet he does not clarify 'queerness' or present any literary or other reason why a character, voicing reactionary comments, molesting a child, appearing then disappearing, is necessary. Hanley continues; 'Moreover the very scenes in that chapter in my mind gave a sort of spectral atmosphere, an identical one for such a man.' Which to this reader's mind is again vague and unsatisfactory; I find myself asking what exactly is 'a sort of spectral atmosphere' and more importantly why is it there. Hanley further adds:

At the same time it does not follow that this character should not reveal himself later on in flesh and blood. [...] it is enough that he enter and disappear in that queer way.⁷⁰⁸

I note Hanley's double-negatives, however the character does *not* appear again, not in this or in any other of the Fury novels and for me it is unsatisfactory that Hanley yet again simply asserts ambiguously that 'it is enough that he enter and disappear in that queer way.' I would therefore contend that Professor Titmouse is created as a pantomime monster in order to disguise opinions which the author suspects will be unacceptable. Like the Fool in *King Lear*⁷⁰⁹ Titmouse has license to speak the unspeakable, to do the unacceptable. As Hanley's editor opined; there is no point to Titmouse's presence. He is not 'real' in any sense. He

⁷⁰⁷ Nicola Wilson, 'Archive Fever: The Publishers' Archive and the History of the Novel' in Patrick Parrinder, Andrew Nash and Nicola Wilson (Eds.), *New Directions in the History of the Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.82

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid*; p.82

⁷⁰⁹ William Shakespeare, *King Lear* 1.1V.96-99 for example

appears, then disappears, having voiced his perverse if learned opinions resurfacing only infrequently as a voice in Peter's head later in the novel. I say 'learned' opinions because after all, he is a Professor. It is a voice tinged again with depraved sensuality as when the reader is told that Peter is walking the streets unsure of where he is going and what he is thinking about; 'What the devil was he thinking about? About Professor Titmouse juggling with the rubber boy'⁷¹⁰ Again, as a kind of voice prodding his sexual-conscience, the sound of the professor's voice enters Peter's head as he lusts for his brother's wife:

"I am not looking,' a voice seemed to whisper into his ears. "I am not interested in your fugitive passions." [...] he could hear this harsh croaking laugh ringing in his ears.⁷¹¹ (author's italics)

The professor's voice surfaces yet again and this time it is as if it is Peter's 'Hyde' nature encouraging him to sexual misconduct as when he eventually kisses his brother's wife and the voice in his head pronounces:

"Did you not see me behind you? You are callous my boy. Your mother cannot come. She is chained to some heavy wood. She cannot come. But I shall not spoil your dish. Ha ha!"⁷¹² (author's italics)

The professor's voice continues to haunt the boy with lewd provocation and hints that it would also be good to have sex with the professor as well as with his brother's wife:

"She [Sheila] can't help it. But come and see me sometime too... I am tremendously interested in social rottenness my boy... The first action is always one of revulsion my boy. But you'll overcome that... you have been educated the wrong way round..."⁷¹³ (author's italics)

⁷¹⁰ James Hanley, *The Furies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.355

⁷¹¹ *ibid*; p.358

⁷¹² *ibid*; p.362

⁷¹³ *ibid*; p.366

And so Titmouse, it could be argued, is a voice which cannot speak its name, a voice which, like the author himself, articulates an interest in 'social rottenness' as expressed in Hanley's long banned short story, 'The German Prisoner'.⁷¹⁴ Thus it appears in disguise, a voice with opinions that the author/narrator does not wish to place on the pages of his novel as being directly attributable to him; a 'reactionary' voice, a depraved voice, one which informs the reader that the *us* who are involved in strikes and rioting and destruction are not 'heroic' as portrayed by Lewis Jones for example, they are in fact stinking monsters without brains, so stupid in fact that they can perhaps even be judged by a clown-like yet evil flibbertigibbet; the eponymous Professor Titmouse.

Whether or not Hanley manages to 'resist the siren calls of political orthodoxies and allegiance, to provide a sense of uniquely working-class voices that stand apart from prescribed ideologies and agendas'⁷¹⁵ or whether the author has drifted apart from his roots and has to resort to placing his own dubious thoughts in the speeches of such as Titmouse, lies in the realms of another debate. However, it is worth referring *en passant* to Hanley's short story 'The German Prisoner' which might explain my above reference to Hanley being interested in 'social rottenness'.

'The German Prisoner' was so filled with homoerotic images closely linked to torture that Hanley had to have it printed privately and in a limited edition in 1930 to avoid a fate at the hand of the censors which befell yet another of his stories; 'Boy', which dwelt on similar themes. *Boy* caused his publishers to be heavily fined and the book itself was banned for almost sixty years.⁷¹⁶ It was banned as an obscene publication for its vivid descriptions of the rape of a thirteen year old boy.⁷¹⁷ Titmouse, in *The Furies*, is portrayed as sexually deviant,

⁷¹⁴ James Hanley, 'The German Prisoner' (Ontario: Exile Editions, 2007)

⁷¹⁵ Joseph Pridmore, 'torture, homoeroticism and subversion in James Hanley's The German Prisoner' at <http://www.pennilesspress.co.uk/prose/hanley.htm> 2006 (accessed July 5th 2014), p.239

⁷¹⁶ *ibid*; p.51

⁷¹⁷ *ibid*

Fanny Fury as sadistically violent; these are themes which are clearly of interest to the author and which he explored elsewhere. Another point worth remembering is that at the time of his writing *The Furys* Hanley would have known, through experience, that his interest in these types of characters needs must be tempered lest it fall foul of the censor's wrath.

However; what is not simply speculation is the suggestion that both *Means-Test Man* and *The Furys* appear to be exceptions to the general findings as presented herein in that they merely appear superficially to be proletariat-literature while in fact they are examples of working-class literature, arguably even *anti* working-class literature. Further, while accepting that propaganda is present to some extent in the vast majority of the novels explored in this thesis I think that Hanley and Brierley present propaganda which would appear to stem from, or favour, an empathy with *them* as opposed to *us*. In this sense I contend that the novel-form is used as a vehicle by both Hanley and Brierley to present a perspective which otherwise might not be acceptable to working-class individuals and that further both novels present a mythical representation of the realities expressed elsewhere in this thesis by those whom Snee would identify as 'proletarian-writers'.

This chapter has centred upon two central ideas; initially the voice of the author/narrator was examined in order to establish whether there was a 'hidden agenda' and also to assess Snee's suggestion that there is a qualitative distinction which divides novels by working-class people into 'working-class literature' as opposed to 'proletarian-writing'; and whether an awareness of class is 'a primary determinant' in recognising such a distinction. I am aware that the term 'proletarian' and a concept of 'proletarian-writing' is something which is little referred to by modern critics and commentators since the decline of the Communist Party's official support for Proletkult in the early thirties. Klaus for example wrote some time ago that although it was once widely used the term 'proletarian' is, 'internationally, on the retreat, while the competing concepts of 'working-class' and 'socialist' continue to command

about equal adherence.⁷¹⁸ However; I can see no other way of labelling or identifying these two novels other than by stating that they may well be written by working-class men but they are not written with that class-awareness or class-empathy of a Tressell, a Holdsworth or a Lewis Jones and thus cannot be categorised in any sense as proletariat-literature. Brierley's novel is an outpouring of despair which I believe is alien to the vast majority of *us* and further, by his sidelining, or even denying the existence of, the events, the class issues and the universality of situations which influence the Cook family, Brierley uses his novel as a vehicle for negativity. It may well be that he is actively presenting the perspective of one who denies the 'worth' of his class for at every opportunity in his own life he sought to escape from it. Hanley expresses a similar negative attitude presenting anti-working-class propaganda via both his narrator and the extraordinary introduction of the character Professor Titmouse.

Both novels are negative. Each in their own way is defeatist. Each could arguably be said to be propaganda vehicles for *them* which is different to the perspectives presented by the other novels discussed herein. This is not to say they are lesser novels, it is simply to acknowledge their difference.

Direct reference to previously identified examples of *them* and their supporters are present only in the form of the police in Hanley's novel. Otherwise the media, Church etc. are not considered in any way.

The next chapter will highlight what could be considered to be propaganda from the other side. Perhaps Snee would pronounce all of the novelists discussed in the next chapter to be 'proletarian-writers'.

⁷¹⁸ Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.1

Part three: 'us'

Chapter nine

These final novels I have chosen to examine are written by writers from the four corners of the United Kingdom and they deal with direct working-class struggles. The novels cover a period from the turn of the twentieth century until approximately the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936-7; all were also written during that period with the exception of Plunkett's novel which was first published in the late 1960's although it covers roughly the same historical period as the other novels mentioned and deals specifically with the period 1907-1914. One deals with agricultural workers, another with village-life and mine-workers, another with a small group of building workers and the final novel with city dwelling working people involved in various forms of manual labour but centred around the docks and the delivery-yards.

The conflicts, within these novels concern the direct effects of the System upon ordinary men and women and the capacity of the working-class to organise and resist or alternatively to remain resolute in the face of overwhelming odds. These novels are concerned with lock-outs and strikes which bring working-people into direct conflict with Capitalism or the System, especially Jones' *Cwmardy* and *We Live*⁷¹⁹ and Plunkett's *Strumpet City*.⁷²⁰ Grassic Gibbon's trilogy of novels which comes under the general heading of *A Scots Quair*⁷²¹ deal with such struggles within an historical framework but centres also on the passage of time and the effects of war, religion and cultural-change on the political consciousness of the land-working people especially. It will be of interest also to discover if the author Grassic Gibbon expresses or reveals in his trilogy of novels his personal opinion that 'religion is no more fundamental to the human character than cancer is fundamental to the human brain'.⁷²² In this section I shall also examine Robert Tressell's unique novel *The Ragged*

⁷¹⁹ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010)

⁷²⁰ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982)

⁷²¹ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006)

⁷²² Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'Religion' in *Smeddum* (Valentina Bold Ed,) (Edinburgh; Canongate) p152

Trousered Philanthropists which seeks to observe the effects of Capitalism on those involved in the building and house restoration business, a novel which explores some of the reasons why the likes of *us* accepted such 'wage slavery' and which makes no secret of the fact that it is a propaganda-novel critical of the status quo and unequivocally advocating an alternative solution.

My purpose in exploring these novels is to identify specifically the way each novelist represents class-attitudes towards precise seats of power; religion, the police, the System, authority etc. To identify where they are similar and where they vary in their attitudes-towards and the identification-of; *them* and *us*. Through a process of specific analysis of the text and the voice(s) of the authors I shall examine what I shall loosely call for now 'similarities' and 'variances', to determine perceived change, progress or altering of attitudes (if any) as the early twentieth century progresses.

It is appropriate that I begin with *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. The first thing to note perhaps is that for Tressell the workers were 'hands' as opposed to 'brains'⁷²³ and as such were valuable only in the same way that a machine was valuable in that System; if the machine was active and working profitably it was exploited by the 'brains' to produce commodities, money and material objects but when it began to get old and to break-down it was ruthlessly discarded.

For Tressell, whose voice intervenes directly and frequently throughout *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, the tradesmen, labourers and improvers in the novel labour

under the delusion that they were Conservatives: similarly others imagined themselves to be Liberals. As a matter of fact most of them were nothing. They knew as much about the public affairs of their own country as they did of the condition of

⁷²³ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.126

affairs in the planet Jupiter.⁷²⁴

Via the popular media, which they read and absorb as truth, the characters in the novel form opinions about ‘foreigners’:

The papers they read were filled with vague and alarming accounts of the quantities of foreign merchandise imported into this country, the enormous number of aliens constantly arriving [...] how they lived, the crimes they committed, and the injury they did to British trade.⁷²⁵

I should make it clear at this stage that the *them* and *us* in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* are divided more clearly than in any other novel discussed herein. The *us* is the author with his political views which he never makes any effort to hide and the *them* are divided, interestingly, into not only the traditional ‘Capitalists’ and the System, but also the majority of the working-men themselves. Only a handful of the characters in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* view the System in the same way as the author, the vast majority are, as the title mockingly yet perceptively suggests, ‘philanthropists’ who willingly part with their skills and their labour, almost as benevolent gifts, to keep the Capitalists living in luxury. These philanthropists cannot even afford to clothe themselves properly, hence are dressed in ragged trousers, and yet they willingly give their all to support the System and those who propagate and exploit it. The author also identifies specific ‘others’ which a reader may safely label as *them* and we shall speak further of these as they surface.

It is difficult to ignore the fact, echoed throughout the pages of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, that despite the author’s protestations that his intent is to merely ‘describe’ the workers and their conditions⁷²⁶ his anger at the ignorance displayed by *us* and at times his loathing for *them* is obvious:

⁷²⁴ *ibid*; p.20

⁷²⁵ *ibid*; p.21

⁷²⁶ *ibid*; pp.11-12

Crass and such of his mates who thought they were Conservatives - the majority of them could not have read a dozen sentences without stumbling - it was not necessary to think or study or investigate anything. It was clear as daylight. The foreigner was the enemy, and the cause of poverty.⁷²⁷

Later the narrator again interjects to describe them as

despicable, because although they saw their children condemned to the same life of degradation, hard labour and privation, yet they refused to help to bring about a better state of affairs.⁷²⁸

There is a sense in which the workers themselves are perceived as 'the enemy' and 'work', despite the atrocious conditions they must endure, is seen as the most desirable objective of their earthly desires. Mitchell asserts that the author presents:

[...] the most massive, contradictory and successful depiction of men at work in our literature. Alienated labour emerges as the chief source of men's woe, but work as such also as the chief source of his joy, his fulfilment.⁷²⁹

However, the author's wrath is not only directed at his fellow-workers. His representation of the 'bosses' and of the 'elite' portray them as equally ignorant as is depicted with mocking humour in the discussion by 'the Brigands' when Rushton (one of the bosses and thus one of the 'brains') observes:

Take this idear that the world is round for instance; I fail to see it! And then they say as Hawstralia is on the other side of the globe, underneath our feet. In my opinion it's

⁷²⁷ *ibid*; p.22

⁷²⁸ *ibid*; p.223

⁷²⁹ Jack Mitchell, 'Early Harvest: Three Anti-Capitalist Novels published in 1914' in Gustav H. Klaus (Ed.), *The Socialist Novel: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.73

ridiculous, because if it was true, wot's to prevent the people droppin' orf?⁷³⁰

Indeed; flat-earththers all, according to Tressell.

At other times however the author even turns his pen against the reader:

If you, reader, had been one of the hands, would you have slogged? Or would you have preferred to starve and see your family starve? If you had been in Crass's place, would you have resigned rather than do such dirty work? If you had Hunter's berth, would you have given it up and voluntarily reduced yourself to the level of the hands? If you had been Rushton, would you rather have become bankrupt than treat your hands and your customers in the same way as your competitors treated theirs?

And then the author resorts to directly mocking the reader:

It may be that, so placed, you - being the noble-minded paragon that you are - would behave unselfishly. But no one has any right to expect you to sacrifice yourself for the benefit of other people, who would only call you a fool for your pains.⁷³¹

This technique, this breaking away from the narrative to directly address the reader has the effect of involving the reader directly and confrontationally in the debate, the direct address seems to say, this may be a novel, but the issues raised are pertinent to you now; how would *you* change the System? Tressell's narrator challenges everyone, including his audience and of course the technique also allows for the development of a 'hero' who is essentially a solitary character.

It is of interest to note that a novel to be discussed later as part of a trilogy by Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *Cloud Howe*, has the central character, Chris, outlining with more compassion and patience than Tressell the historical reasons why the workers respond as they do with regard

⁷³⁰ *ibid*; p.283

⁷³¹ *ibid*; pp.217-18

to the System. Chris is reminiscing on the history of 'her folk' and how they apparently also appear as philanthropists sacrificing all for their 'betters'. Chris though, unlike Tressell's central character, observes

her folk – who kept such alive – [...] chaving⁷³² from the blink of day for a meal, serfs and land-workers whom the Mowats rode down, whom the armies harried and the kings spat on [...] and were tortured and broken by the gentry's men, the rule and the way of life that had left them the pitiful gossiping clowns that they were⁷³³

Chris sees at least some possible historical explanation as to why workers, who have similar perspectives and attitudes to Tressell's Crass, Hunter and co, behaved as they did. Grassic Gibbon's heroine reminds the reader that while the workers may have been reduced to 'gossiping clowns' the history of these people needs to be examined if a reader is to understand exactly why they support a System which so cruelly abuses them. However, as Tressell observes later: 'What those who wish to perpetuate the system deserve is another question.'⁷³⁴

Wilson identifies an extremely interesting analogy when she frames the work places of these philanthropists as places of isolation and at times places of virtual imprisonment where each worker is isolated in solitary confinement in allocated rooms where they perform their allocated tasks:

[...] the philanthropists are increasingly pinioned to the spot and related to specific minutiae associated firstly with the room they are working in and then with the particular object they are painting [...] Their employers, on the other hand, have freedom of movement across the house's interior.⁷³⁵

⁷³² 'struggling'.

⁷³³ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.313

⁷³⁴ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.129

⁷³⁵ Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), p.45

A peculiar *them* and *us* then emerges if a reader views the workplace as a prison and the workers as prisoners being watched over by the hierarchy of 'guards'; foremen, coddies, the bosses and those individuals who are purchasing their labour. In our perhaps more enlightened times a perceptive reader may see the relationship between employer and employee having evolved from the Master/Servant or Jailer/Prisoner relationship which Wilson conjures.

Some of Tressell's most virulent comments are reserved for organised religion and the hypocrisy of those who profess to be 'believers'. The characters that accumulate around the Shining Light Chapel include Hunter who is the foreman at Rushton and Co., and is variously described as a 'bully', a 'ghoul' and 'a slave-driver'. Then there is Slyme, whose very name describes his character and there are the clergy themselves; the Rev Belcher who, literally, explodes because he is so grossly fat,⁷³⁶ the Rev Boshier who steals from the poor⁷³⁷ and the Rev John Starr whose sole purpose is to 'bolster up the characters of the despicable crew of sweaters and slave-drivers who paid his wages.'⁷³⁸ Other individuals who attend this chapel include those with such revealing names as Mr. Didlum, Mr. Sweater and Mrs. Starvem,⁷³⁹ Mr. Grinder, Mr. Dauber, Mr. Botchit and Mr. Smeeriton.⁷⁴⁰ Both the author and the 'hero' Owen comment so frequently on the fact that organised religion serves only the upper-classes, the bosses and the elite that it actually becomes like a background refrain to the novel, something to be expected and to be accepted as fact whether the reader agrees with the sentiment or not. For example, the narrator intervenes to inform the reader in a dogmatic voice which invites no debate that

⁷³⁶ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.269

⁷³⁷ *ibid*; pp.363-4

⁷³⁸ *ibid*; p.185

⁷³⁹ *ibid*; p.179

⁷⁴⁰ *ibid*; p.623

there was no truth in the Christian religion. All that was necessary was to look at the conduct of the individuals who were its votaries.⁷⁴¹

And again:

[...] the pretended disciples of Christ - the liars and hypocrites who professed to believe that all men are brothers and God their Father.⁷⁴²

The message stemming directly from the narrator's mouth is clear and unequivocal; *all* who profess to be Christians are both hypocrites and liars and this, despite the author's assertion in his preface, that 'no attack is made upon sincere religion'⁷⁴³ and the fact that in his real life the author was a Catholic who frequently spent time decorating the walls of churches and that his daughter Kathleen described him as an 'agnostic' who 'believed in the historical Jesus and his teachings but not in his divinity'.⁷⁴⁴

An important difference between *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and the other novels which are discussed in this thesis is revealed in one particular and unique example of *them* and *us*; the police in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* are officious but not generally unkind or brutal, perhaps this is because the workers in the novel are in the habit of seeing each other as the enemy and as such they seldom come into conflict with authority of any kind. It is interesting however to note that the 'wealthy' socialist Barrington in his 'Great Oration' sees no role for the police in his vision of a 'Co-operative Commonwealth', because as all people will be equal the role of the police, which is apparently solely to protect property, shall be unnecessary:

We shall not need, as at present, to maintain a police force to protect the property of

⁷⁴¹ *ibid*; p.71

⁷⁴² *ibid*; p.610

⁷⁴³ *ibid*; p.12

⁷⁴⁴ Dave Harker, *Tressell: The real story of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Zed Books; 2003), p.14

the rich.⁷⁴⁵

It is perhaps also worth noting that Tressell himself, despite being a diminutive and frail man,⁷⁴⁶ was not averse to removing his coat and 'adopting a fighting attitude' when confronting a police-constable whom he believed had been bullying a child.⁷⁴⁷

It is as well to remind the reader to be always aware of the fact that Tressell identifies the uneducated working-class themselves as *them*, albeit a *them* who are created by ignorance. Also, when the author/narrator has exhausted his wrath at the bosses, the reader, the workers themselves and the alleged hypocrites who inhabit the Church, the author's single most consistent refrain is that it is actually the System that is to blame. He also reserves a pertinent observation with regard to those who perpetuate the System:

[...] *all* who live under the present system practise selfishness, more or less. We must be selfish: the system demands it [...] we must either injure or be injured. It is the system that deserves to be blamed. What those who wish to perpetuate the system deserve is another question.⁷⁴⁸

Later the author's 'hero' Owen comments, 'the principle of the present system [is] - every man for himself and the devil take the rest.'⁷⁴⁹ There is even a complete chapter, 'Vive La System',⁷⁵⁰ which details why the System is at fault and in this chapter the hero Owen opines that

the starving, bootless, ragged, stupid wretches fell down and worshipped the System,

⁷⁴⁵ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.521

⁷⁴⁶ Dave Harker, *Tressell: The real story of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Zed Books; 2003), p.10

⁷⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.13

⁷⁴⁸ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.129

⁷⁴⁹ *ibid*; p.274

⁷⁵⁰ *ibid*; p.394

and offered up their children as living sacrifices upon its altars.⁷⁵¹

Harsh language again; directly stating that the working-class themselves deliberately kill their own offspring for the sake of the System.

Although written over a hundred years ago at a time when women did not even have a vote, and although the women are portrayed as helpless pawns in much the same way as the majority of male-workers are portrayed, the author depicts women as bearing the suffering on an equal footing to the men. Indeed frequently they suffer more going without food in order to pay rent and to ensure their menfolk have food. The men however in the main see the women as 'other'. Sex also, when discussed by working-men in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, is often simply smutty references and innuendo as when Harlow is relating a tale about a man, his wife and his daughter who were all heavy drinkers:

When the old man was out, one could have anything one liked to ask from either of 'em for half a pint of beer, but for his part, said Harlow, he could never fancy it. They were both too ugly.⁷⁵²

Laughter and ribald comments follow; "If it'd been me, I should 'ave shut me bl---y eyes" cried sawkins' and "It's not their faces you want, you know" added Bundy'.⁷⁵³ When it is not ribald and music-hall, sex is sordid or deceitful as when Crass observes through a crack in the woodwork; 'Rushton in the act of kissing and embracing Miss Wade'⁷⁵⁴ or when Slyme seduces the intoxicated Ruth; 'whilst he was helping her, Slyme kissed her repeatedly and passionately as she lay limp and unresisting'.⁷⁵⁵

The author has compassion for the women but it is a shortfall in the novel that they are at

⁷⁵¹ ibid; p.397

⁷⁵² ibid; p.149

⁷⁵³ ibid; p.150

⁷⁵⁴ ibid; p.254

⁷⁵⁵ ibid; p.267

some levels peripheral, however as has been noted elsewhere; at the time of writing few women worked outside of the home and the work they did for wages at home isolated them further. I note that Yeo suggests that Tressell 'keeps his women protected at home';⁷⁵⁶ however I feel that observation fails to consider Tressell's stated reasons for writing his undisguised propaganda novel and the fact that his commentary is a personal observation; as such it would not embrace the wider aspects of workplace experience such as the conditions of women in small sweatshop occupations or in mills.

I feel that at this stage I should comment briefly upon the constant criticism of Tressell's novel for its failure in literary terms as expressed by, amongst others, Orwell. I draw attention to what the historian R. M. Fox opined, with *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* in mind, concerning the manner in which the literature of 'wage earners' appears to evolve; 'it only reaches maturity when it ceases to be pitched in a wholly aggressive key and expresses the life of workers as something of intrinsic worth and interest.'⁷⁵⁷ Fox (who spent ten years working on the factory floor) recognised that the fact that Tressell has an axe to grind is not a weakness but a strength, he also reminds us that many of the workers in the novel do indeed take an interest in art, politics and literature and that their life therefore contains much of 'intrinsic worth and interest'. That said however Tressell states quite clearly in his preface that he is 'one of the damned', this is not a literary exercise for him and nor is it for many readers; it is the passion, the integrity, the forcefulness and above all the sincerity of what Tressell was aiming to do which expresses the novel's greatness.

Throughout *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and even more so in Plunkett's *Strumpet City* a reader sees the men united either by their political beliefs, the public houses or their Unions. The men go off to work *together* while the women are left at home, *isolated*. To that

⁷⁵⁶ Eileen Yeo, 'Women and Socialism in Tressell's World' in David Alfred (Ed.), *The Robert Tressell Lectures 1981-88* (Rochester 1988), p.85

⁷⁵⁷ Richard Michael Fox, *The Triumphant Machine* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), pp.85-87

extent women are separate from the central struggles in the same way that the crippled Rashers Tierney is in *Strumpet City*; they have no labour to sell, thus they are not part of the greater struggle which exists between 'hands' and 'brains'. This however is not universal in the novels under consideration in this chapter and a different perspective is portrayed in the novels of Lewis Jones and Grassic Gibbon, as shall be seen.

Plunkett's *Strumpet City* is set in Dublin and covers the period 1907-1914; it traces the lives of working-men involved for the most part in a series of strikes. In this novel the strikers are carters, dockers and furnace-men often struggling against employer lock-outs which relate directly or indirectly to their membership of James Larkin's Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. It is reasonable to state at this point that I agree profoundly with Calahan's observation that in *Strumpet City* too many observers and critics have centred on the real-life character of James Larkin. Calahan observes that for Plunkett 'Larkin is more a symbol than a flesh-and-blood character.'⁷⁵⁸ The novel is not *about* Larkin; he is a peripheral historical character flitting like a ghost throughout the novel, Larkin should be seen as a symbol of the unity of *us* when forced into confrontation with *them*.

Strumpet City is a novel which has been described as 'a masterpiece'.⁷⁵⁹ Certainly in its scope and compass it holds more literary status than either Lewis Jones or Robert Tressell's novels. While Tressell angrily lectures *us* and pours scorn upon *them* Plunkett seems intent on analysing the core of the problem, to more fully understand and explain how and why *us* and *them* function as they do. Tressell presents the enlightened voice reduced to anger while Plunkett debates the genuine dilemmas of not only working-people but those who are prevented from doing what they know to be right by a corrupt System.

⁷⁵⁸ James M. Cahalan, 'The Making of *Strumpet City*: James Plunkett and the Historical Vision', in *Éire-Ireland*, 13, 4 (Winter 1978), (pp.81-100) p.92

⁷⁵⁹ Pluto Press, '100 years since the Dublin Lockout' <https://plutopress.wordpress.com/2013/08/26/100-years-since-the-dublin-lockout-26th-august-1913/> (accessed August 26th 2013)

Whilst dealing with the strikers and workers in a sympathetic manner *Strumpet City* also describes in intimate detail and with some empathy the lives of the employers, the clergy and even the underclass in a detached and apparently unbiased manner. It describes and dramatises a period in history and individuals in history which/who are based on events/characters that took place in historical reality; the Dublin strikes and lockouts in the years preceding the Great War.

Plunkett's benevolent narrator comments upon three central members of the Catholic Church, presenting them so that together they depict what is perhaps a rounded picture of the Church as a whole. A Holy Trinity perhaps which reveals failings in each segment but when viewed as a single entity may well present a balanced truth. Each individual priest displays different traits which could easily have been stereotypes but thanks to the author's descriptions they amalgamate to depict The Catholic Church. Thus religion in general is treated more like 'the heart in a heartless world' than 'the opium of the people'.⁷⁶⁰

Perhaps an illustration of a general attitude exhibited by the workers towards the Church and religion in *Strumpet City* would be useful before proceeding to examine these three Priests in them/us terms. The crippled and virtually unemployable 'Rashers' Tierney has been arrested and is in a cell when a policeman questions him about his failure to provide a 'real' name. 'Rashers' explains it was the only name he ever knew and that he never knew his parents, so the policeman asks him who gave him the name 'Rashers':

'A little woman by the name of Molloy that lived in the basement of 3 Chandlers Court. I came to her at the age of four.'

'From where?'

⁷⁶⁰ Karl Marx, 'Wage Labour and Capital', in *Arm and Hammer Series*: Lucien Sanial (Ed.), (New York: Labor News Company, 1902), p.3

'They never found out. Maybe God left me under a dustbin lid.'⁷⁶¹

Throughout the novel this crippled and ragged orphan attends regularly at Mass and is clearly a believer in some kind of Supreme Being. As Father Giffley remarks later on; 'Our parishioners keep the faith. It is the only thing most of them have.'⁷⁶² A similar approach to the Church and religion is reflected by the vast majority of the working-men in *Strumpet City*, including the alleged Marxists loyal to Larkin, even the fearsome scab-bashing hero Bernie Mulhall has the priest attend on him to bring Mass following the loss of his legs.⁷⁶³

But to the individual trinity of Priests. On the one hand the reader is presented with the young and virtuous priest Father O'Connor who enjoys fine music and the company of the upper-crust Kingstown-set, namely the Bradshaws (affluent slum landlords) and Yearling⁷⁶⁴ (a wealthy playboy). O'Connor is described by Mr. Bradshaw as 'a genuinely modest man'⁷⁶⁵ but by his superior Father Giffley as 'contemptuous. And a prig. Ought to shave himself in holy water.'⁷⁶⁶ The truth seems to be that he is a man striving to do what he believes to be right even if it means supporting strike-breakers. His salvation occurs when he is confronted with the corpse of 'Rashers' Tierney, a man he had once mistreated. Rashers dies of starvation in a basement, rats eat his body and O'Connor is called to administer the last rites. It is in this filthy basement room that he recognises 'This was the true reality of his world.'⁷⁶⁷ The voice of this previously judgmental Priest finds 'a new tone of gentleness'⁷⁶⁸ as he baptises the decaying corpse and wraps his own mother's rosary beads around Rasher's half-eaten hands. James Cahalan finds it ironic that Father O'Connor 'feels close to the poor

⁷⁶¹ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.39

⁷⁶² *ibid*; p.105

⁷⁶³ *ibid*; p.436

⁷⁶⁴ Whom Plunkett himself described rather concisely in an interview as 'an embryo Bernard Shaw' in González Rosa, *Writing out of One's Own Experience: an Interview with James Plunkett* (Universidad de Barcelona *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 5, 1992), p.188

⁷⁶⁵ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.43

⁷⁶⁶ *ibid*; p.519

⁷⁶⁷ *ibid*; p.570

⁷⁶⁸ *ibid*; p.571

only when he goes to minister to the decaying corpse of Rashers⁷⁶⁹ but it is not at all ironic; the rosemary beads were important to O'Connor, the act of wrapping them around the decayed hands of a man he had offended is the only genuine act of contrition that is afforded to O'Connor. He grows in stature when confronted with the concrete reality of how the poor die and with this realisation comes his own salvation. Therein sits a 'miracle'; that the decomposing corpse of a man he had always displayed contempt for leads to his personal salvation. Cahalan presumes an irony because he sees O'Connor feeling close to the poor but in fact his salvation stems from the fact that this dishevelled and despised orphan's lonely and cruel death has brought the Priest closer to his God. The reader becomes aware at this moment that O'Connor has had a genuine road-to-Damascus experience and that he will remain at St. Brigid's parish to serve the poor and downtrodden. Unlike his friends the Bradshaws and Yearling he will not desert either the people or the parish.

At the other extreme a reader observes Father Giffley, who never lets pass an opportunity to admonish O'Connor. Giffley is a passionate man with a sometimes bitter tongue who ventures into public-houses to drink with working-men⁷⁷⁰ and when he discovers that these men are members of Larkin's Union he reveals his empathy for their cause; 'Followers of Mr. Larkin [...] You do right.'⁷⁷¹ So he buys the men a round of drinks. Later, apparently suffering hallucinations through delirium tremors, he again walks the streets and drinks whiskey in a public house⁷⁷² and this leads to him angrily confronting police who are breaking into the workers' tenements destroying furniture and assaulting strikers, calling one of the police-officers 'a glib-tongued, lying rogue.'⁷⁷³ Enraged by the police brutality he takes a cab to Liberty Hall and confronts Larkin himself and tenders an offer to help but although

⁷⁶⁹ James M. Cahalan, 'The Making of *Strumpet City*: James Plunkett and the Historical Vision', in *Éire-Ireland*, 13, 4 (Winter 1978), (pp.81-100), p.91

⁷⁷⁰ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), pp.341-3

⁷⁷¹ *ibid*; p.343

⁷⁷² *ibid*; p.519

⁷⁷³ *ibid*; p.524

sympathetic Larkin turns him down, leaving Giffley

ashamed. It was a shame he had never experienced before, a dark tide of shame from the half world he had tried to defend himself against all day. He began to sob, but without tears. Larkin put his arm about his shoulder.⁷⁷⁴

The alcohol, coupled with his disillusionment at the plight of his parishioners, drives Giffley insane and we read of his attempt to raise a dead-man back to life, throwing the coffin to the floor in front of the deceased's terrified wife in the mortuary chapel.⁷⁷⁵ Father Giffley is torn between his realisation that his sympathies lie with *us* while the sympathies of the Church he serves lie with *them*.

Between these two extremes sits Father O'Sullivan, the uncomplicated priest, at home with his parishioners and acting as mediator between O'Connor and Giffley when he can.⁷⁷⁶ O'Sullivan's modest ambition is to write a religious pamphlet and have it published and sold for a few coppers.⁷⁷⁷ He is the man who tends to the religious needs of Bernie Mulhall after he loses both of his feet in an accident and O'Sullivan balances some concerns of this strong Union man when Mulhall asks:

'Do you condemn us Father?'

'I go here and I go there,' Father O'Sullivan said. 'and the things I see would melt a heart of stone.'

'Yet some of the priests is never done condemning us.'

'And some don't,' Father O'Sullivan reminded him. 'but at the same time you'd be the last to want them marching in procession with you.'

⁷⁷⁴ *ibid*; pp.528-9

⁷⁷⁵ *ibid*; p.532

⁷⁷⁶ *ibid*; p.225

⁷⁷⁷ *ibid*; p.310

'I want them all to keep out of it – that's what I want' Mulhall said vehemently.⁷⁷⁸

O'Sullivan states that a difference of opinion between the workers, the employers and the Church is acceptable but not to let differences of opinion lead to hatred:

'No matter what a man – or a priest for that matter – says or does, you can oppose him certainly, but you must love him all the same.'⁷⁷⁹

O'Sullivan is the priest who can joke with God about his new squeaky boots which are causing him some pain:

Father O'Sullivan for a while made fun of squeaking boots as he and Jesus Christ went together through the back lanes of the city. He never once mentioned the pain.⁷⁸⁰

So these three priests together form a peculiar holy-trinity, they are each unique individuals but together they represent an overview of the Church which is totally different to Tressell's outright condemnation of all organised religion and also to Lewis Jones' view that there are strong differences between the lay-preachers (often workers themselves) and the Chapel-preachers in the Welsh valleys. Nor for Plunkett is there a clear division placing the Church or its servants as *them* for surely Giffley at least empathises with the plight of the workers, the downtrodden, with *us*.

The differences in approach in these novels are not history-orientated,⁷⁸¹ nor is there an Irish, Scots, English, Welsh entity although there is surely something in the upbringing of

⁷⁷⁸ *ibid*; p.436

⁷⁷⁹ *ibid*; p.437

⁷⁸⁰ *ibid*; p.434

⁷⁸¹ *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was written in the early 1900's, *Strumpet City* covers the period 1907-1914 and *Cwmardy & We Live* deals with a period centred around the General Strike of 1926.

Jones which would have necessitated familiarity with the peculiarly Welsh Chapel culture which permeated the small villages in the valleys; there were constant efforts from the late nineteenth century to integrate chapel, education and a socialist perspective and though that is outside of the brief of this thesis an example might be in order. Harry Hobart was a member of the London Society of Compositors connected with the Social Democratic Federation and its news/education pamphlet 'Justice'. His constant efforts to form links between progressive working-people's organisations in the Welsh valleys are well documented however when he did organise meetings and discussions in chapels the attendance was often scant because of 'the interference of certain influential personages, who advised those who had resolved to come to stay away, because Socialism meant Atheism and everything else that was bad'. Hobart wrote about a meeting held at Pontarddulais being discouraging due to 'a sort of bastard Socialism', having previously been preached which stressed the role of trade unionism and political pragmatism over 'a thorough collective principle of ownership. The men themselves therefore seem more disposed to be satisfied with a little improvement of their present condition than to strive for an entirely new system.'⁷⁸²

Such a familiarity with his immediate history may well have caused Jones to hold back in his condemnation of organised religion in the belief that such condemnation may prove counterproductive.

However, with Plunkett it seems clear that he is not offering a condemnation of the Church and thus not categorising the Church as *them*; instead, by presenting his trinity of priests Plunkett seems to be saying that it is individuals who, by their own character, upbringing and desires, present us with one single viewpoint that distorts our concepts and perhaps

⁷⁸² H. W. Hobart, 'Social Democratic Federation', *Justice* 17 December 1892. Cited in Martin Wright, 'Wales and Socialism; Political Culture and National Identity c. 1880-1914', Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Cardiff University, 2011. Online: <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/26969/1/2012wrightmkphd.pdf> (accessed 22nd June 2016)

prevents us from seeing a greater truth.

Tressell, whilst writing his book, was a worker on building-sites being paid 7d an hour as a skilled tradesman.⁷⁸³ These would be building sites and projects where a 'slaughter'⁷⁸⁴ could condemn every man to hunger and poverty. Indeed Tressell himself was to die of tuberculosis aged just forty one and was destined to be buried in a paupers' grave.⁷⁸⁵ Perhaps therefore the author's anger and almost vitriolic contempt for his own fellow-workers, is understandable. He observed a reality and reflected his personal views with regard to organised religion. Views amplified and exposed by the people in his novel who attend The Shining Light Chapel, all of whom, without exception, supported the System which condemned workers and their families to premature death or the workhouse.

Lewis Jones was self-educated and a politician/Trade-Unionist/activist for all of his working life, and he died in 1939 aged just 42.⁷⁸⁶ His voice is that of the professional political animal with an axe to grind, people to educate and a cause to be won. For Lewis Jones, however, religion permeated the coal that the miners hewed, it was the thread woven throughout the very essence of Welsh culture and as such, though sometimes anti-labour, was not portrayed as a prime cause of the problems. Indeed chapel churches and small religious communities often extolled quasi-socialist values as has been briefly alluded to earlier, and Jones' character Dai Cannon for example is both a miner and a lay-preacher who is respected by the otherwise religiously sceptical Big Jim Roberts. The narrator informs us: 'he [Big Jim] never went to chapel himself he had a deep respect for the opinions of those who

⁷⁸³ Dave Harker, *Tressell: The real story of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Zed Books; 2003), p.11

⁷⁸⁴ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.302 ('slaughter': A mass sacking; handed out with only an hour's notice)

⁷⁸⁵ F. C. Ball, *One of the Damned* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973), p.160

⁷⁸⁶ Claire Andrea Flay, 'The Subversive Cinderella: Gender, Class and Colonialism in the Work of Dorothy Edwards' (1903-1934)' Glamorgan University research paper <http://dspace1.isd.glam.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10265/325/1/flay.pdf> 2008 (accessed December 15th 2014), p.206

did.⁷⁸⁷

James Plunkett on the other hand was educated at Synge Street Christian Brothers' School (Motto; 'Act Manly'), then Dublin College of Music, he was assistant head of drama at *Radio Eireann* and later producer-director, head of features and senior producer with *Radio Telefis Eireann* as well as being Branch secretary with The Workers Union of Ireland. He was a middle-class, well-educated, white-collar worker all of his life until his death at eighty three. His view of the clergy, while not uncritical, is tempered by his first-hand association with many priests as teachers and friends of the family.⁷⁸⁸ His work with the Unions and his friendship with the radical socialist Jim Larkin would have brought him into contact with striking-workers and working-class families thus his overview is perhaps more tempered than that of either Jones or Tressell. He sees, perhaps, a bigger picture.

Plunkett, an accomplished writer of novels, plays, scripts, poetry and articles, does however feel it necessary to have his narrator intervene directly to express what seems to be the author's opinion in at least one section of *Strumpet City* and when he does so his anger is apparent. It is aimed at the Church and at 'British Blacklegs':

When their [the members of the Church] duty was done and Sunday was over they read of the arrival in the city of a large contingent of British Blacklegs. They saw nothing wrong in this, although it was designed to take the bread out of the mouths of the men and women and children they had just been collecting for. It was a crime to deport children in order to feed them, but no crime to bring in adults to see that they continued in starvation. When the workers organised a protest, the local clergy and the Brothers of St. Vincent deplored mutually the grip the Atheists held on the city.⁷⁸⁹

The irony is bitter, the condemnation forthright and the hypocrisy of these 'Brothers of St

⁷⁸⁷ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.40

⁷⁸⁸ *The Times*: Obituaries June 7th 2003

⁷⁸⁹ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.507

Vincent', evident.

Plunkett, as has been mentioned earlier, paints a picture of a kindly policeman Sergeant Muldoon who, chastened by the impending death of his son from meningitis, releases 'Rashers' Tierney, from his cell and gives him a shilling from his own pocket.⁷⁹⁰ However, that is the only 'kindly' police-officer in the book. Mainly, as is also the case in Grassie Gibbon's and Jones' novels, the police are bullies, thugs and defenders of the status quo, something separate from the working-class. As Ethel Holdsworth would have it they are the; 'slaves chosen from slaves to keep them in their place',⁷⁹¹ an observation in keeping with Haywood's assertion that 'the police are stock figures of class oppression and betrayal in working-class demonology'.⁷⁹²

I have earlier referred to Father Giffley making a stand against the police and to the fact that throughout *Strumpet City* the police are portrayed almost exclusively in negative terms. To that effect it should be noted that when 'Rashers' Tierney arrives 'home' having been released from his cell, clutching the shilling he has been handed by the kindly police Sergeant, his dog, Rusty, licks the dried blood from his face.⁷⁹³ Blood which is there because when he was falsely arrested the arresting police-officer assaulted this diminutive and crippled man.⁷⁹⁴

The police are seen as directly political according to the voice of Jim Larkin which surfaces several times in Plunkett's novel:

The police [...] had closed the quays. They said it was to avoid disturbances but that was not the truth. It was to aid and abet the employers in their plan to import free

⁷⁹⁰ *ibid*; p.40

⁷⁹¹ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.24

⁷⁹² Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997), p.54

⁷⁹³ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.48

⁷⁹⁴ *ibid*; p30

labour. The Government had made its police force the minions of the employers instead of the servants of the citizens.⁷⁹⁵

The police also baton-charge strikers and hurl them into the river leaving one man almost dead and several with serious injuries⁷⁹⁶ and it is interesting to note how much more realistic are these scenes of police brutality than the ones described in *Cwmardy* when strikers, rather melodramatically, fight blacklegs with 'lead piping, wooden clubs and other weapons'⁷⁹⁷ and even with guns; 'the steel barrel of a pistol flashed in the sun like a streak of blood.'⁷⁹⁸ In *Cwmardy* and *We Live* police brutality is displayed almost casually; 'clubs swished down on unprotected heads'⁷⁹⁹ and the strikers invariably 'defeat' the police in the same unconvincing and unrealistic way that they defeat the employers:

[...] the attack [by the strikers] disorganised the police, who ran like rabbits for refuge in the neighbouring side-streets [...] gradually the police were driven from the Square, which was left in the possession of the strikers.⁸⁰⁰

Snee considers this to be one of the strengths of Jones' writing, these vivid descriptions of collective action⁸⁰¹ which, she maintains, reveal 'the strength and potential power of a united working class.'⁸⁰² Snee argues that Lewis Jones' novels, (and incidentally, Brierley's *Means Test Man*) appropriate the realist novel for what could be seen as working-class ends. *Cwmardy* is described as a novel which 'balances the individual consciousness of events and the collective will.'⁸⁰³ I however, while agreeing that the realist novel is being developed as it were by both authors, maintain that each presents literary exaggerations to make their point; they are creating dramas with the intent of amplifying a political perspective. However,

⁷⁹⁵ *ibid*; p.150

⁷⁹⁶ *ibid*; p.153

⁷⁹⁷ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.217

⁷⁹⁸ *ibid*; p.216

⁷⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.237

⁸⁰⁰ *ibid*; p.240

⁸⁰¹ Carole Snee, 'Working-Class or Proletarian Writing?' in John Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (Eds.) *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1979), p.185

⁸⁰² *ibid*; p184

⁸⁰³ *ibid*; p187

as has been argued in a previous chapter, Brierly is presenting a minority perspective while Jones is at least presenting a drama which is seen as a faithful representation by the majority of readers. Both authors adapt and develop aspects of the 'thesis novel'; Brierley presents aspirational proletarian literature while Jones moves less consciously towards working-class writing aimed more perhaps at the politically aware reader. Each however, consciously or subconsciously, presents the reader with *roman à these* for each sees a view of the world that is political and in need of commentary.

To return however to the theme of *them* and *us* as presented in working-class novels. The police in *Strumpet City* are drafted into the City with the deliberate intent of intimidating workers:

[...] the police patrolled the city in unprecedented numbers. They guarded railway stations, they stood in strong formations at the entrances to principal streets. Their presence filled the city with uneasiness.⁸⁰⁴

When the trams are made idle through the actions of strikers 'scabs' take over the work and are protected by the police,⁸⁰⁵ these same police get drunk on duty⁸⁰⁶ and, whether instructed to or not they behave like thugs; 'The police were carrying out raids on the tenements, smashing furniture, breaking delph, beating up the inhabitants.'⁸⁰⁷

Similarly in *A Scots Quair* police are pitiless during protests in the streets as when the police sergeant grabbed

a young keelie by the collar and lifted his baton and hit him, crack! – crack like a

⁸⁰⁴ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.289

⁸⁰⁵ *ibid*; p.393

⁸⁰⁶ *ibid*; p.397

⁸⁰⁷ *ibid*; p.403

calsay-stone hit by a hammer [...] the boy screamed: and then there was hell.⁸⁰⁸

This is a brutal and unprovoked incident which is covered up-by or blamed-on 'Communists' by the media,⁸⁰⁹ the Lord Provost and the Chief Constable.⁸¹⁰ These same police are ruthless when they have a suspect in their cells:

[...] two of them held him while [police Sergeant] Sim Leslie bashed him, then they knocked him from fist to fist across the cell [...] Then, the cell wavering, they picked him up and flung him down on the wooden trestle⁸¹¹

Thus for all of these novelists the police are unequivocally 'other'; they are the group in society who choose to serve *them* and the bitter irony is that they stem from the ranks of *us*. Only two other novels are as vehement with their condemnation of the police; *This Slavery* (chapter six) and *How late it was, how late* (chapter seven).

Sex and/or sexuality are never specifically discussed in *Strumpet City* but love is present. There is no sense of embarrassment in Plunkett's novel (as is the case in Jones' novels for example) when portraying the love between working-men and women, it is discussed often; even the special love which centres on the love of Pat the carter for Lily Maxwell the prostitute stricken with syphilis.⁸¹² When Pat is drunk, out-of-sorts or has had a run of luck 'on the horses' he makes for Lily's tenement-flat; they joke, each is at ease, even when the lack of 'business' is discussed:

'How is business?'

⁸⁰⁸ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.535

⁸⁰⁹ *ibid*; p.536

⁸¹⁰ *ibid*; p.537

⁸¹¹ *ibid*; p.609

⁸¹² As an interesting aside it's worth noting that in November 1867 the name Lily Maxwell was the name of the very first woman to vote in Britain (though her vote was later declared illegal): The Women's Suffrage Movement Timeline http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/sites/userfiles/files/suffragette_timeline.pdf p.1 (accessed July 4th 2016)

'Bloody terrible,' Lily said. 'How would you expect it to be on an Easter Tuesday? They're all after making their Easter duty. Finishing up their retreats and mending their souls.'

'What about the Protestants?'

'It seems this is a Roman Catholic area.'

'The Army?'

'On leave. Or blew it all of an Easter Monday.'

'And the students?'

'They only come to be seen...'⁸¹³

Each knows the other intimately because, 'They had grown up together, played together, found out the usual things together.'⁸¹⁴ Sex can be discussed without embarrassment because, 'They both came from a world where very little ever remained to be known after the age of twelve or thirteen.'⁸¹⁵

In a poignant and heartfelt scene Pat gives Lily £4.00 to 'look after' and as he slips into a drunken sleep she tries to tell him that she has contracted syphilis;

'[...] get in beside me.'

'I told you there's something wrong with me.' She half shouted it at him.

And when Pat finally is slipping into sleep Lily looks at him

⁸¹³ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.128

⁸¹⁴ *ibid*; p.129

⁸¹⁵ *ibid*

‘with lonely affection.’

She voices a poignant plea as he sleeps:

‘Jesus help me,’ she whispered. ‘Jesus help me.’ She was crying.⁸¹⁶

It is interesting to compare the description of Pat and Lily with Jones’ description of Len and Mary as their relationship develops in *Cwmardy*. Plunkett shows a spendthrift carter and a young prostitute in love, speaking freely about their hopes and fears; the narrator’s simple observation that as Lily whispers her fears to God and to the sleeping figure ‘She was crying’ indicates a confidence with words and an acceptance of sexuality and love which is totally lacking in Jones’ immature portrayal of two unworldly teenagers whom the author seems to be either afraid to examine in detail or is inadequate to portray. Pikoulis however would have it that the lack of a closely revealed relationship between Len and Mary is due to the fact that Mary becomes ‘coldly intolerant in a good cause’ and gains authority from that stance while Len remains passive because of her attitudes, and further that Mary’s ‘unconvincing’ rise to leadership externalizes Len’s struggle with their relationship.⁸¹⁷ It is an interesting psychological assertion but for me such an approach seems to divorce itself from the fact that these characters in a novel are simply not central to Jones’ main theme. They emphasise it but are peripheral; tools with which the writer engages the reader in the central story detailing the heroism and struggles of the working-people as a whole, namely *us*, against the System, against *them*.

Of course in Plunkett’s novel Lily Maxwell is also peripheral and yet paradoxically she is also representative of the ‘Strumpet’ in the novel’s title. In some ways she could actually be seen as the heroine too, as of course could the City itself. Dublin is the City which prostitutes itself to *them* with the initial chapter showing Dublin opening her doors to welcome Royalty and its

⁸¹⁶ *ibid*; p.131

⁸¹⁷ John Pikoulis, ‘Lewis Jones’ in *Anglo-Welsh Review* number 74, (1983), p.71

closing section showing bitter defeat on all fronts while Capitalism still pays the harlot for her services. Dublin is now a city where Father Giffley is insane, 'Rashers' has starved to death, the brave Mulhall has died following his horrific accident, the workers are defeated, the principled Farrel is still blacklisted, the poor have been crushed (those in Bradshaw's collapsed slums; literally so), James Larkin imprisoned, Fitz is blacklisted and forced to join the British Army⁸¹⁸ and ordinary, decent workers are left to continue their struggle against Capitalism, poverty and disease. William Martin Murphy however, the Boss who callously announced during the *real* Dublin lockout that

everyone of the shareholders, to the number of five, six, or seven thousands, will have three meals a day whether the men succeed or not. I don't know if the men who go out can count on this⁸¹⁹

...thrived.

In Plunkett's novel the forces of Capital in this Strumpet of a City still dictate to the workers while Yearling and the Bradshaw's have fled with their riches to different climes. One commentator made an observation that was indubitably and rather wittily correct; 'Like Lily Maxwell, it (Dublin) had its endearing features and it had ties of loyalty transcending both feudal bonds and market forces but it had succumbed to contagious disease'.⁸²⁰ Lily Maxwell is representative of *us*, that 'contagious disease' is the ruthless force of the System, *them*.

However, Lily Maxwell has herself become chaste as the novel concludes. She is now devoted to a single 'cause' and has recovered from her own 'contagious disease'. Pat and Lily are the survivors; Pat, the itinerant gambler, the barefoot socialist who would give his

⁸¹⁸ In Plunkett's follow-on novel, *Farewell Companions*, we discover Fitz is blinded by gas (Plunkett James, *Farewell Companions* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1978), p.31

⁸¹⁹ University College Cork, 'Movements for Political & Social Reform, 1870–1914, Saturday, 27th July 1913' http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Dublin_1913Strike_and_Lockout (accessed October 7th 2014)

⁸²⁰ Helena Sheehan, 'Irish Television Drama' in *Radio Telefís Éireann: 2nd* (revised) edition, 2004, p.119

last penny, and his boots,⁸²¹ to his friends has the redoubtable Lily at his side, the strumpet with a heart of gold. These two stride like Adam and Eve towards the utopian Paradise of Socialism which the vast majority of their class dream of at some level. Together they represent hope for the future on a battlefield which was changing rapidly for on the horizon sat the spectre of the 'terrible beauty' of the Easter-uprising and the continuation of the struggle to make Ireland independent of British rule. Another *them* and *us* situation. Only the City itself endures, echoing the continuity of the enduring earth in Grassie Gibbon's trilogy.

Fitz and Mary's love however is portrayed as more traditionally romantic. She is a 'servant in training' and he a stoker but there is real tenderness in their brief moments together, as when Fitz proposes:

'You love me?' He had withdrawn a little to ask her and she could see his face. Its tenderness brought her near to tears. She nodded.

'Say it.'

She paused a moment and then said: 'I love you.'

'And you'll marry me?'

'I'll marry you.'⁸²²

And on their wedding night 'They lay in the darkness two lovers in a dilapidated world, knowing each other for the first time.'⁸²³

Apart from tender descriptions of love Plunkett fixes on the isolation and alienation of women in much the same way Tressell does but with infinitely more insight. Mrs. Gilchrist, after a

⁸²¹ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), pp.164-5

⁸²² *ibid*; p.123

⁸²³ *ibid*

lifetime of devotion 'in service', dies alone in the workhouse. Mary, indeed all the women, wave goodbye to their lovers, partners, brothers, fathers as they leave for work or go off to the pub or attend a Union meeting. The 'revolution' or the next battle with the employers embraces the solidarity of most of the men while the women settle for more material dreams nurtured via their isolation, an isolation which induces a thought-process centred more practically perhaps than that of the men. In *Strumpet City* for example Mary's thought-process is clear:

Fitz was a foreman now, with a foreman's wages. They might get a little cottage of their own somewhere, away from the squalor and tragedy of Chandlers Court. Mrs. Bradshaw was her friend, generous and thoughtful, a person of influence in Fitz's employment. That was the important thing, to have a friend in high places.⁸²⁴

Each reference to Mary and her problems shows how isolated she and the other women are and how different their dreams are to those of their men-folk:

Mary, alone with her sleeping children, sat on the window overlooking the street [...] Hunger and want were again part of her world, twin possibilities that threatened in her moments of solitude and were now calamitous presences in the shadowed corners of the street.⁸²⁵

Working-class male authors describe mainly the activities of men, for that is what they know about; though some seek to empathise with women they remain for the most part alien and other; a *them* through their enforced isolation.

Lewis Jones' two novels, *Cwmardy* and *We Live*, have a similar background to *Strumpet City* in that the central theme is strikes-and-lockouts. Jones was a coal miner in the Cambrian Colliery where he began his working life aged just twelve working underground right from the

⁸²⁴ *ibid*; p.370

⁸²⁵ *ibid*; p.410

start.⁸²⁶ It was an infamous colliery, central in the Rhondda riots which followed an employers' lock-out which in its turn was followed swiftly by a miners' strike in 1910. This was a strike during which Home Secretary Winston Churchill ordered troops to be sent into Tonypandy to reinforce the local constabulary who were under severe pressure from rioting miners selectively attacking businesses in the town. On the night of the 8th November violent struggles followed and troops with fixed bayonets on their rifles fought throughout the night with local miners.⁸²⁷

With this hands-on working-class background Lewis Jones educated himself via the Central Labour College where he studied politics and then joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1925. He was imprisoned for sedition in 1926, and elected to Glamorgan County Council in 1936.⁸²⁸ The CPGB however repeatedly disciplined him for dissent and he was sent home from Russia for remaining seated during a standing ovation for Stalin.⁸²⁹ His two novels cover a period in history dating from just prior to the General Strike of 1926 up to the Spanish Civil War of 1936, the novels are one continuous narrative thus I propose to treat them as a single novel and page-references herein link to the 2010 Library of Wales publication which presents both novels together.

As with *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* the author's voice is clear but there is no direct intervention, no commentary interrupted by outbursts that are unambiguously attributable to the author. Instead what the reader is presented with is a narrative relating the actual events of the time written by someone involved in mining, strikes and left-wing politics. Unlike Tressell, Jones' perspective is more tolerant of the individuals involved; he identifies and describes the conflicts and the individuals realistically although they may still, on

⁸²⁶ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.iv

⁸²⁷ Neil Prior, 'Rhondda marks 100th anniversary of Tonypandy Riots' on *BBC News, Wales* 2010
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-11655470> (accessed February 21st 2013)

⁸²⁸ John Harris, *A Bibliographical Guide to Twenty-Four Modern Anglo-Welsh Writers* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p.186

⁸²⁹ McIlroy John, Morgan Kevin and Campbell Alan (Eds.), 'Party People, Communist Lives' in *Explorations in Biography* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2001), p.25

occasion, present as being somewhat stereotypical of character and many are almost certainly based on people the author knew.⁸³⁰

Two points need to be made prior to exploring Jones' novels. Firstly they *are* 'novels'. Some political and social events described therein did actually occur, as indeed is the case with Plunkett's novels, but they are not described with full historical accuracy. Secondly; the author, either by creative-design or through an inability to write within the framework of the great tradition, does not portray his characters as anything other than workmen struggling, often blindly, for better conditions. There is no specific or obvious political voice from Jones as there is from Tressell. True his 'heroes' are from the 'left' but essentially the author is relaying a story about incidents he has witnessed and/or been a part of, there is little attempt to proselytise the reader; more an attempt to relay things 'as they are' at the time of his writing.

The main focus of Jones' novels is Len and his 'hard man' father; 'Big Jim' Roberts who is a veteran of the War Boer and who, although his best friend Dai Cannon is himself a lay-preacher, never attends chapel.⁸³¹ Big Jim lives with Len's tough-because-she-has-to-be mother, Sian and the family live in a miners' cottage which is one of eight at 'Sunny Bank'. Both novels are populated with 'characters' such as the miners' leader, Ezra, whose ideology fades throughout both novels to apparent disillusionment, which is, as Del Valle Alcalá suggests, attributable to past paths paved with 'compromises and self-betrays'.⁸³² Ezra puts himself at loggerheads with Len, especially when the latter joins the CPGB. There is also Ezra's daughter Mary, who loves her father so much that she finds herself in somewhat of a predicament when Len courts her and eventually marries her. There are the

⁸³⁰ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.xii

⁸³¹ *ibid*; p.40

⁸³² Roberto Del Valle Alcalá, *Rising with One's Community: Socialist Theory and Bildungsroman in Lewis Jones* (universidad autónoma de madrid, 2009), p.151 online: <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/CLR/article/viewFile/226366/307972> (accessed November 9th 2015)

continuous, almost seamless runs of strikes which leave the working-people literally starving. In this way the novels echo the hunger and deprivation of the central characters both in the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and *Strumpet City*. Lord Cwmardy, the pit-owner, almost a cliché 'evil baron', dwells in 'the huge house' with its 'verandas and rolling lawns' and 'lake that glistened a little lower down in the grounds.'⁸³³ It is he, so the author/narrator informs us, who ultimately decides the fate of the people in Cwmardy despite the struggles of the miners for some kind of equality and fairness which they see, in the main, as something that is a mixture of socialism and the religion expounded in the Chapels.

It needs to be noted that Jones' novels appear to be badly written when measured against traditional yardsticks. Similes are weak and ill-conceived, as when a woman, distraught at the loss of her husband in a pit accident falls to her knees weeping and tearing out her hair in grief is described thus; 'The woman's mouth opened and shut like a frog's'⁸³⁴ or when Big Jim is recalling his horror at viewing a mound of miners' bodies burned beyond recognition the author tells us that 'What he had seen floated before his eyes like a horrible picture'.⁸³⁵ Len's emotion at a political meeting is described thus: 'He felt half satisfied, like a starving man who eats a small sandwich.'⁸³⁶ One does not have to be an advocate of the great tradition to recoil slightly when reading such apparently unimaginative descriptions. Even the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1937 whilst praising Jones' presentation of 'plain fact' denied that he was a 'creative artist' and stated that *Cwmardy's* 'crudity is that of its place and people.'⁸³⁷

Jones' characters rarely step beyond two-dimensions. Big Jim for example, whenever his attributes are defined, is described in such repetitive and inadequately considered terms as:

⁸³³ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.39

⁸³⁴ *ibid*; p.103

⁸³⁵ *ibid*; p.125

⁸³⁶ *ibid*; p.370

⁸³⁷ *Times Literary Supplement*; August 14th 1937

'Big Jim's *great* voice rang out above the storm'⁸³⁸ and he; 'jerked his *great* body erect'⁸³⁹ or 'Jim's *magnificent* nude body'⁸⁴⁰ or 'Big Jim inflated his *magnificent* chest.'⁸⁴¹ (my italics in all examples) and so on throughout the books. Often what must have been hellish experiences are reduced to melodrama by the use of weak adjectives, inadequate descriptive prose and ill-chosen similes. There are also endless and unnecessary descriptions by the author telling the reader obvious proclamations about the characters. Two examples occur within the same paragraph; 'This emotional volatility was one of his [Ezra's] main characteristics' and 'This had the effect on Len of mentally fusing father and daughter together.'⁸⁴² It is difficult to fathom how undoubtedly exciting incidents such as almost nightly street-battles, armed clashes with the police, terrible mining-disasters and appalling human-suffering can be described so inadequately by an author who has surely lived through similar incidents and has experienced the emotions which they must have aroused. Jones was not only a miner but a spokesman for his fellow workers and a prominent member of the then politically-influential CPGB and yet his novels read as though they are written third-hand, by someone relaying what may be truths but which appear at times, due to unconvincing rhetoric, as half-truths. David Smith further observes that although the novel's 'realism' is to be admired they are written in an 'extremely amateurish' manner sustained only by 'awkward passion'⁸⁴³ and while Snee also is right to challenge the Leavisite canon when it is applied to working-class writers and to correctly assert that it is ideologically determined,⁸⁴⁴ this does not in itself constitute a strong defence for Jones' weak and inadequate style. Snee argues that Jones' strength as an author lies in his descriptions of 'the potential power of a united working class',⁸⁴⁵ but that, I would maintain, is the strength of his convictions which do not

⁸³⁸ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.102

⁸³⁹ *ibid*; p.125

⁸⁴⁰ *ibid*; p.158

⁸⁴¹ *ibid*; p.779

⁸⁴² *ibid*; p.521

⁸⁴³ David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp.67-68

⁸⁴⁴ Carole Snee, 'Working Class Literature or Proletarian Writing' in Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies, and Carole Snee (Eds.), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), p.169

⁸⁴⁵ *ibid*; p184

necessarily reflect in his writing style.

Even the chapter titles seem like those presented in English 'Early Reader' books. In Jones' novels we have: 'Len Goes to School',⁸⁴⁶ 'Len Works for Peace',⁸⁴⁷ 'Strife in the Valley',⁸⁴⁸ and then 'Len Goes to Gaol'.⁸⁴⁹ I can see no justification whatsoever for David Smith's assertion that the chapter titles bolster the impression of collective realism and convey muscular militancy and am totally bemused by his notion that the titles reflect Jones' troubled relationship with the CPGB.⁸⁵⁰

This simplistic style however does have one advantage and it is that it makes the novels easily accessible and as the writer is a working-man presumably his target audience would be working-people. *Cwmardy* and *We Live* at least have the advantage of being written at a level where the presumed target audience, *us*, would have little difficulty understanding the author's actual prose which a writer for the Left Review at the time, Arnold Rattenbury, asserted consciously adopted an 'aesthetic of simplicity'.⁸⁵¹

However, the perceived literary failings of the novels of Jones should not detract from the lucid and accurate social scenario which he portrays. The women in both Plunkett's and Tressell's novel for example are described always as being separate from 'the struggle' and although they are often portrayed sympathetically they are seldom 'involved'. Jones on the other hand describes Big Jim's wife Sian as a mainstay of the family, it is she who has to cope when the strikes occur and money is scarce. Sian is the one whom Big Jim hands his pay packet to and then accepts whatever she hands back as pocket-money. Finances are totally her responsibility and when it comes to budgeting, her 'educated' son Len assumes

⁸⁴⁶ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.25

⁸⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.349

⁸⁴⁸ *ibid*; p.545

⁸⁴⁹ *ibid*; p.621

⁸⁵⁰ David Smith, *Lewis Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), p.58 & p.20

⁸⁵¹ Arnold Rattenbury, 'Total Attainder and the Helots' in John Lucas (Ed.), *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy* (Brighton: Harvester, 1978), p.158

the role of a mere clerk:

Sian remained at the table planning how best to share the pay between the various debts that had accumulated during the past fortnight. Len wrote the items down at her dictation. Several times she made him change them, but at last she seemed satisfied⁸⁵²

And in one memorable scene, which has faint echoes of Zola's *Germinal* wherein Mother Brulé slices off the genitalia of Maigrat the shopkeeper who forced the women to pay for goods with sexual favours,⁸⁵³ Sian takes charge of the public humiliation of Evan the Overman who was the father of the man whom she believed had seduced her deceased daughter. Her revenge is fulfilled as she humbles Evan by clothing him in a nightdress and only she knows the true significance of it:

[...] the nightdress in which she had robed her enemy belonged to the dead daughter his son had besmirched.⁸⁵⁴

Sometimes also, the veracity of the scenes described by the author hits home. For example Mary, Ezra's daughter, is shown from the start to be an independent, intelligent and political individual whom the reader encounters for the first time when our 'hero' Len attends school; 'His [Len's] natural quickness soon took him ahead of the other pupils with the exception of Mary.'⁸⁵⁵ As both novels progress Mary's character develops with the author informing the reader that; 'She [Mary] was her husband's superior intellectually having the capacity to think more coherently and feel less acutely'⁸⁵⁶ and she is elected as a Communist candidate to the town council.⁸⁵⁷ However, Len, embarrassingly, 'lectures' her on 'feminism':

⁸⁵² Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.92

⁸⁵³ Emile Zola, *Germinal*, Havelock Ellis translation (Harmondsworth: Everyman Library Edition: 1994), p.245

⁸⁵⁴ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.256

⁸⁵⁵ *ibid*; p.28

⁸⁵⁶ *ibid*; p.522

⁸⁵⁷ *ibid*; p.723

The boys in work talk of girls as the owners talk of us. The owners make us slaves in the pit and our men make the women their slaves in the house.⁸⁵⁸

And again:

I have heard my butties talk about women exactly as if they were cattle.⁸⁵⁹

Mary eventually replies to his patronising speech with what might perhaps be viewed as an embarrassing comment:

You have made me think a lot by what you've said, and I don't know quite where I stand.⁸⁶⁰

Her recognition of the 'correctness' of all that Len has said is outweighed by the fact that she apparently needed telling about the problems women face, by a man, thus, as Fox perceptively points out; 'women's power (in *Cwmardy*) is at once recognised and devalued'.⁸⁶¹

A similar attitude towards women, is presented when Len again speaks to Mary thus; 'You are a woman and don't understand these things.'⁸⁶² Mary, even when she is in the hierarchy of the Communist Party and an elected Councillor is frequently portrayed as making the tea for the men and at one point when a group of Communists are working on designing a leaflet, with no explanation relating to any external factor such as her being unwell or overworked, the men actually send her to bed: 'Mary, in spite of her protests, was sent to

⁸⁵⁸ *ibid*; p.262

⁸⁵⁹ *ibid*; p.263

⁸⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁸⁶¹ Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p.191

⁸⁶² Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.568

bed long before the stencil was finished.⁸⁶³

It is worth highlighting one other grating anomaly which suggests, if not that women are *them*, that they are 'other'; when Len or Ezra make great speeches they are set down verbatim, when Mary makes a speech the author presents the following:

She [Mary] gazed *dumbly* at the huge blur of faces that confronted her, and her courage oozed away as she realised that, having captured the platform, the people now expected her to say something. She opened her mouth and heard a *pitiful little squeal* which made her close it again sharply.⁸⁶⁴ (my italics)

Later on the same page the reader is informed that

[...] for the first time in her life, she made a speech.

Her concluding words were accompanied by a burst of applause, after which Harry took control of the meeting⁸⁶⁵

The point is that not a single word of her speech is thought worthy of relaying to the reader. Apparently it is enough that she actually found a voice albeit one which was 'a pitiful little squeal'.

Despite Len's presumptions to know better than Mary, women are in fact *us* and they fight alongside the men as political and social equals being respected heads of the family and elected Councillors in this working-class community. It is a strange anomaly which places intelligent women at the heart of the family and the community and yet describes situations where they appear submissive and are apparently incapable of cognitive development.

⁸⁶³ *ibid*; p.701

⁸⁶⁴ *ibid*; p.655

⁸⁶⁵ *ibid*

The clergy in *Cwmardy* and *We Live* are not treated with such utter scorn as Tressell treats them in his novel, nor with the attempt at balance of Plunkett, nor with the mocking contempt of Grassie Gibbon. In Jones' novels they are generally divided into three groups; there are 'lay-preachers' like Dai Canon⁸⁶⁶ whom the men respect as a fellow-worker, the exception-to-the-rule the Deacon Job Calfaria who is also an ex-miner and who is as such fully aware of the difficulties facing the miners⁸⁶⁷ and the formal chapel hierarchy.

The parsons, preachers and Deacons however, those responsible for the chapels, are either ignorant of the aspirations of the workers, naïve in the extreme or are part of the System which constitutes *them*. Preacher Hughes for example shows either naivety or stupidity when he remarks; 'I say there should be no politics in the union.'⁸⁶⁸ The sort of comment which links with the notion of 'bastard Socialism' being preached in some chapels and referred to earlier by Hobart.⁸⁶⁹ These religious 'professionals', however are in reality actively sympathetic with the pit-owners/Capitalism/the-System, as is shown when Ezra does a deal behind the backs of the miners with Lord Cwmardy and is branded a 'traitor'⁸⁷⁰ the response of the established Church however is

the message [that Ezra had ended the strike] gave delight to the preachers and shopkeepers, the vicar going so far as to liken Ezra to Moses leading his people out of the desert.⁸⁷¹

These clergy are unconditional supporters of the war; a recruitment rally has 'on stage' the following important people:

⁸⁶⁶ *ibid*; p.11

⁸⁶⁷ *ibid*; p.191 & p.550

⁸⁶⁸ *ibid*; p.470

⁸⁶⁹ H. W. Hobart, 'Social Democratic Federation', *Justice* 17 December 1892. Cited in Martin Wright, 'Wales and Socialism; Political Culture and National Identity c. 1880-1914'. Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Cardiff University, 2011. Online: <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/26969/1/2012wrightmkphd.pdf> (accessed June 22nd 2016)

⁸⁷⁰ *ibid*; p.489

⁸⁷¹ *ibid*; p.495

[...] a short, fat, clean-shaven man who edited a famous journal and was later imprisoned for swindling, the bishop in his robes, Mr. Evans Cardi, a few local preachers, the vicar from the church⁸⁷²

More generally however the ordinary workers are portrayed throughout as religious if sceptical about the clergy in contrast to Tressell's oft-repeated charge that all 'believers' are hypocrites. God is there in the lives of Jones' miners and their families, something presented as fact. However; this God often refuses to listen to their prayers as when Sian voices what seems to be the general despair of the majority of the workers following the death of her daughter Jane in child-birth:

All my life I have prayed to God. Every Sunday I have gone to His Chapel. In everything I have tried to live in His ways. Yes. I loved him. And yet the first time I do ask Him for mercy he do turn against me.⁸⁷³

Len, still a boy when Jane dies, also ponders on the matter of her death and who is 'responsible':

"The good God has given and the good God has taken away", and he wondered what they meant [...] perhaps God had killed Jane and not Evan the Overman's son.⁸⁷⁴

Religion is used by some of Jones' characters to arrive at the most peculiar notions as when Sian voices the following opinions regarding Len's efforts to educate himself:

No good will come from all this reading, Len bach. The Lord have put into your head all that it be good for you to know, and if you go beyond that you will be sure to end up in the 'sylum, like your poor uncle John.

⁸⁷² *ibid*; p.342

⁸⁷³ *ibid*; p.77

⁸⁷⁴ *ibid*; p.87

Then Sian adds, quite soberly:

God help him.⁸⁷⁵

I note this not to scoff at the opinions or beliefs of the workers; Jones is surely recording what he hears every day of his life. Unlike Tressell however that is all he does; he records it. As a Communist himself he never believed in a God but his task, as he sees it, is not to present an active political thesis (as Tressell) but to write a novel and to his way of thinking that would not intentionally include voicing his personal opinions; as a communist it would be the workers as a whole whose voice mattered, or the voice of the Party.

The police however are portrayed with scathing contempt by Jones. They are vicious, they are the bosses' 'spies'⁸⁷⁶ and there is even a confused and rather muddled suggestion that one of them murdered a child.⁸⁷⁷ The motive for the child's death is said to be robbery as a 'few shillings' had 'perhaps' been stolen, however the murdered child *had* witnessed David, the son of Lord Cwmardy, being humiliated by Len and Big Jim in an earlier confrontation,⁸⁷⁸ a confrontation centring upon the fact that the child was being forced to work like a slave to pay for David's life-style. In front of his father and the boy and several other workers Len harangues the coal-bosses son with:

See the blood on every pound-note you change, taste the battered bodies on every bit of food you eat, see the flesh sticking on the coal you burn. Aye, and when we refuse to work to keep you fat and idle, send your police in to baton us down.⁸⁷⁹

The whole incident however seems irrelevant to the story and the child's death is eventually treated as an accident, but it is the subject of rumours and gossip as reflected in Sian's

⁸⁷⁵ *ibid*; p.188

⁸⁷⁶ *ibid*; p.409

⁸⁷⁷ *ibid*; pp.569-72

⁸⁷⁸ *ibid*; pp.562-4

⁸⁷⁹ *ibid*; p.564

observation on the matter of the child's death:

There is nothing too bad for those pleece to do, and I 'oodn't trust one of 'em not a inch further than I could throw him.⁸⁸⁰

The police in Jones' novels refer to the workers as 'bloody Bolshies',⁸⁸¹ the author/narrator describes them in a way that is reminiscent of the cockroaches which inhabit the mines; 'the specially imported police had left their hiding places in the dark corners and alley-ways of Cwmardy'⁸⁸² and the police not only spy for the bosses they are quite prepared to fabricate evidence against the workers:

The taller of the two [policemen] raised his head from the keyhole for a moment⁸⁸³

Then another police-officer states that there may be a problem if they do not hear anything 'important', to which the reply is:

Huh! What do that matter? We can always put it down in the station the same as if we have heard it, can't we?⁸⁸⁴

The police are brutal; 'The police charged into the crowd, hitting madly at every head within reach.'⁸⁸⁵ When Len is arrested and taken into custody he is surrounded by policemen, knocked to the floor:

[...] boots made fine weapons. Better than batons, he thought, when a man was down. He saw them, big, black and shiny, staring at him from all parts of the cell, and their cold, glittering hardness appalled him. He felt them driving into his head and

⁸⁸⁰ *ibid*; p.575

⁸⁸¹ *ibid*; p.417

⁸⁸² *ibid*; p.511

⁸⁸³ *ibid*; p.409

⁸⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁸⁵ *ibid*; p.625

body⁸⁸⁶

This scene is very similar to the 'torture scene' in *A Scots Quair* when Owen is pitilessly beaten by three policemen in a police-station cell.⁸⁸⁷

Throughout Jones' novels can be found no trace of anyone even remotely similar to the kindly Police Sergeant Muldoon in James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* who takes pity on the orphaned 'Rashers' Tierney after he has been arrested and put in a cell for disturbing the peace when he was in fact the victim of a pick-pocket. The sergeant brings him a cup of tea and a slice of bread in his cell and asks:

'Have you money?'

'Every penny was lifted of me. Isn't that what has me where I am?'

The sergeant took a shilling from his pocket and gave it to Rashers.

Rashers looked at it suspiciously. A charity from a police sergeant was one of the impossibilities of his world.⁸⁸⁸

An odd theme which seems to pervade the novels of Lewis Jones is an almost imperceptible hint at incestuous relations which we shall return to in more detail when examining the *Scots Quair* trilogy by Grassie Gibbon. Sex is dealt with in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, *Cwmardy* and *We Live* in an embarrassed, almost immature manner, but the theme of incest, or more correctly the hints at incest, in Jones' novels are significant. Len, in *Cwmardy*, as a boy, sleeps with his sister Jane and he notices her development into womanhood:

⁸⁸⁶ *ibid*; p.629

⁸⁸⁷ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.609

⁸⁸⁸ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.40

[...] this did not solve the problem that was consuming Len. Jane had not had a baby like his mother yet her breasts were big.

When the young girl came into bed he cuddled up to her, and soon fell asleep with his hand on her bosom and his mind full of queries.⁸⁸⁹

Later Jane is caught in the act of having sex with a young man and at home together that evening the following incident occurs:

Jane reached up in the gloom and drew his [Len's] wavy head to her bosom, which he clasped with a loving tenderness [...] Twisting on her side she huddled him back under the bedclothes, taking care not to remove his hand. In this posture they both cried themselves to sleep.⁸⁹⁰

Mary also has an odd encounter with her father Ezra which the author describes thus; 'for the first time in many years he caught her passionately to him and kissed her tenderly.'⁸⁹¹

Of course this may simply be the author's habit of choosing inappropriate words in his novels but it reads strangely to this reader. The incidents between a younger brother and an older sister similarly may be innocent descriptions of their relationship and it is certainly true that in the period being written about children of all ages and sexes slept together. In a novel which was published in the same period as Jones' novels, *No Mean City*, the central characters are the Stark family who slept eleven individuals of both sexes in two rooms in a Gorbals tenement slum.⁸⁹²

In general however sex is not dealt with in detail by Jones except from the perspective of

⁸⁸⁹ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.41

⁸⁹⁰ *ibid*; p.54

⁸⁹¹ *ibid*: p.244

⁸⁹² A. McArthur and H. Kingsley Long, *No Mean City* (London: Corgi, 1957), p.8

Len when he is a boy aged about eleven and is still concerned mainly with his sister's developing body. On a day-out to the seaside Len and his mother are walking by the golf-links and Len is peeping at courting-couples and recalling his sister Jane:

What he saw set his brain whirling [...] he remembered Jane undressing and saw her panting breasts. The conjured picture sent little tingling ripples through his flesh. He thought he had unravelled the problem of the difference between girl's breasts and his own. What he had seen demonstrated that the former were larger so that men could play with them and caress them.⁸⁹³

The innocence of the boy's thoughts is reflected in the childish simplicity of the short, factual sentences and yet there is something naive in the actual presentation by the author too; the use of the word 'breasts' for example, seems almost coy and the author is not actually averse to using the word 'tits' if it is to describe a man's chest. In the mine with his father Len observes him 'rubbing his naked chest vigorously and muttering, 'Oh, my poor tits.'⁸⁹⁴ Later when Len actually stumbles across his sister making love she tries to hide 'a pink garment' and again the language and presentation by the author is confusing. Len would surely have seen Jane many times putting on and removing her clothes so why is this 'a pink garment' and not her 'knickers' or 'underwear'? Is it the author's reluctance to be seen discussing or describing women's under-garments? Is it indicative of a *them* and *us* which may help to explain, what Fox refers to, as the author's simultaneous recognition and devaluation of women?⁸⁹⁵ The garment is referred to twice as the 'pink garment' and once as the 'betraying garment'. When Sian arrives upon the scene the flow of words between herself, Jane and the young man are filled with phrases and words suggesting almost horror at the situation; Jane is 'deathly white' and 'tight-lipped with nerves twitching', Sian's eyes are 'full of fear' and she is 'absorbed in her own misery', the youth blurts his words out 'hysterically' while

⁸⁹³ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.48

⁸⁹⁴ *ibid*; p.307

⁸⁹⁵ Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p.191

Len is totally confused; 'He wondered what had happened to make her [Sian] look so sad and old.'⁸⁹⁶

Len's obsession with his sister continues into his teens when he is falling in love with Mary, Ezra's daughter. Following a meeting with Mary and Ezra he returns home and as he 'tossed about in his bed' that night he thought of Mary; 'he longed to see the body under her clothes. He likened her to Jane, but failed to imagine the small body carrying robust breasts like his sister.'⁸⁹⁷ Again the language is oddly restrained, almost a-sensual; 'robust' breasts seems more like a description of Big Jim's muscular torso which is constantly referred to throughout the novels as 'magnificent', 'huge', 'great' etc.

There are several encounters between Len and Mary when they are courting and sex-and-love are linked in these encounters. Len though is the sole purveyor of sexual thoughts and actions and only one other sexual-encounter with regard to other characters happens in the novel and that also indirectly concerns Len. Big Jim has been away for three years at the war and returns home. In the bedroom next to theirs that night Len lies awake listening to his father and mother making love:

The sounds made him think of Mary, and again he felt the soft contact of her body [...] Little flushes of heat ran through his flesh at the memory⁸⁹⁸

Len and Mary, politically active, organise 'a circle' whose declared purpose is to 'teach us about the working-class'⁸⁹⁹ reflecting incidentally an observation by Hawthorn that for working-class people at the time reading was frequently a shared rather than a private experience, one often organised by religious or political groups.⁹⁰⁰ Within this circle ideas

⁸⁹⁶ *ibid*; p.51

⁸⁹⁷ *ibid*; p.291

⁸⁹⁸ *ibid*; p.390

⁸⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.301

⁹⁰⁰ Jeremy Hawthorn (Ed.), *The British Working-Class novel in the Twentieth Century* (London:

could be exchanged and Len, as Secretary of the Circle, begins 'organising lectures and debates, bringing in speakers from outside the valley.'⁹⁰¹ One of the lectures is on 'Sex, its purpose, problems and diseases.'⁹⁰² and Len suggests that the women should not attend the lecture; 'There are things we can't talk about before women [...] It isn't right.'⁹⁰³ Nonetheless the lecture proceeds with the women present and during it Len 'felt an insane desire to get up and order Mary out.'⁹⁰⁴ The lecture goes into detail about syphilis and Len's 'whole being revolted at the idea' and that night 'his sleep was disturbed by dreams that left him moist with a cold sweat.'⁹⁰⁵ This is a teenage boy, working in the pits among coarse working-men, he is also politically active to the point where he is organising educational-classes for the youth of the village and yet he wants women banned from meetings where sex is discussed and he is tortured by nightmares about sexually transmitted diseases. I feel it is a fair observation that both the character Len and the author/narrator Lewis Jones see women as somehow 'other', if not actually being in a position where they are regarded as *them*, and perhaps Len's desire to 'protect' women from such knowledge is a peculiar and accurately-recorded instance of gender-based attitudes prevalent at the time.

David Smith notes, almost in passing, Jones' frequent association of sexuality, illness and death with regard to the character Len, drawing attention to the frailty of his chosen partner Mary and his incestuous thoughts centring on his sister who died in child-birth,⁹⁰⁶ highlighting perhaps an attitude indicative of a generation gap that reads oddly in the twenty-first century. Cunningham also seems to skirt around the central portrayal of Len as a sexually-inadequate hero choosing to relocate Big Jim as *Bildungsroman* thus neatly avoiding the actuality of the text.⁹⁰⁷ Bell also I feel misses the point by presuming that the novels' purpose

Edward Arnold, 1984) p.viii

⁹⁰¹ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.305

⁹⁰² *ibid*; p.309

⁹⁰³ *ibid*

⁹⁰⁴ *ibid*; p.310

⁹⁰⁵ *ibid*

⁹⁰⁶ David Smith, *Lewis Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), p.65

⁹⁰⁷ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: University Press, 1988), pp.167-74

is 'support of Communism by a Communist'.⁹⁰⁸ I feel that the portrayal of Len by Jones expresses exactly the opposite; by showing Len to be physically and emotionally weak the author exhibits the same doubts he himself held with regard to the CPGB, doubts which he expressed in his personal life when he was disciplined for remaining seated throughout an otherwise standing ovation for Stalin at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow.⁹⁰⁹

I wrote earlier about Jones' novels not being historical tracts. The action described however does refer to specific historical incidents the most obvious of which are the 1926 General Strike and the 1936 Spanish Civil War. The chapter entitled 'Soldiers are Sent to the Valley'⁹¹⁰ describes an incident where striking miners are read 'the Riot Act' and then when troops fire at the strikers; 'eleven strikers fell to the earth as if struck by gigantic sledgehammers.'⁹¹¹ It is indisputable that in Jones' story these men are killed but in fact, although Churchill in November 1910 did order troops into Tonypandy during strikes, there is no historical evidence that they fired upon anyone although there is evidence that Churchill was prepared for such an eventuality and sent a memo about the Tonypandy rioters to A. G. Gardiner, then editor of *The Daily News*, to clarify his position.⁹¹²

Similar events and incidents are portrayed in a slightly distorted manner by the author who would have us believe for example that Len apparently was 'instructed' by the Communist Party of Great Britain to go to Spain in 1926:

Harry taking Len and Mary on one side to tell them: 'You'll have to go in three days Len, so you'd better come tomorrow to see about your passport.' Mary squeezed his

⁹⁰⁸ David Bell, 'Ardent Propaganda: Miners' Novels and Class Conflict 1929-1939' in *Uppsala*: Swedish Science Press: University of Umeå, (1995) p.4

⁹⁰⁹ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: University Press, 1988), p.308

⁹¹⁰ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.251

⁹¹¹ *ibid*; p.276

⁹¹² Darren Devine, 'Wales Online'
<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/churchill-memo-tonypandy-riots-up-6677339>
(accessed February 5th 2014), p.1

hand proudly in hers and looked at Harry. '*Whatever the Party says, we'll be ready*'.⁹¹³ (my italics)

Another rather odd portrayal of the CPGB is evident when Mary says of a Comrade who has threatened to resign from The Party:

There can be no resignations from our Party, and if he does what he threatened, there's nothing else for us to do but expel him.⁹¹⁴

I feel a need to say that I was active in the CPGB for twenty six years and resigned twice and I was also aware of several other individuals who moved on to join other groups such as the IMG, the Labour Party and even the Liberals. Perhaps the CPGB had progressed since the time Jones was a member or perhaps his account is presented by the author as a means to exhibit his growing concern with the authoritarian nature of the revolutionary politics he was involved with. To add to this many see Len's death in Spain as the predictable end to his career as working-class hero, however others see it as futile, a meaningless death recorded by the author almost as an aside.

Jones' writing at times seems to be naïve as has been mentioned previously. This is revealed again in the chapter 'Troops are Sent into the Valley'; the strike is progressing as most strikes do, the men on strike are involved in minor acts of sabotage, picketing, sheep-rustling, coal-scrumping, times are hard for the women trying to make ends meet, the bosses are secure knowing that the Police and the establishment are there to defend *them*. Then, in this account by Jones, the reader is told:

Gradually the officials became stricken with fear and the management failed to persuade or coerce them to the pits, with the result that the directors had to

⁹¹³ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.842

⁹¹⁴ *ibid*; p.708

reconsider the whole position and decide to grant the men's demands.⁹¹⁵

The last words in this chapter read:

News of the victory was conveyed to the people [...] The roar that followed the announcement swept the news down the valley like a raging fire, and the windows of the Big House quivered in the victorious tremulo.⁹¹⁶

This kind of instant 'Victory', with the bosses 'stricken with fear' has never happened in my experience, nor can I recall reading of such victories other than those which were short-lived.⁹¹⁷ The real war between *them* and *us* has always been a war of attrition with small victories won along the way but few outright wins for either side. Perhaps a consideration of *them* and *us* should always hold foremost that there are authors with agendas which may cloud their recall; on both sides.

A greater literary novel perhaps, or more correctly trilogy of novels, is Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*.⁹¹⁸ All references herein shall treat *A Scots Quair* as a single continuous narrative as presented in the 2006 Polygon publication.

The author was born in 1901; his upbringing was middle-class. Described at school as 'a brilliant school pupil',⁹¹⁹ he progressed from beginning his working-life as a journalist to becoming a professional author until his death from peritonitis at the age of thirty four. He was brought up in the Mearns and so would have knowledge of the crofters' lives and the hardships which they faced. Indeed his father was a crofter who moved with his family to

⁹¹⁵ *ibid*; p.279

⁹¹⁶ *ibid*; p.279

⁹¹⁷ As for example: '*The Battle of Saltley Gate - Close the Gates!*'

<https://sites.google.com/site/saltleygate/> (accessed September 20th 2025)

⁹¹⁸ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006)

⁹¹⁹ *ibid*; p.ii

Bloomfield when the author was aged eight.⁹²⁰

One of the features distinguishing *A Scots Quair* from a purely factual account of an historical period lies in Grassic Gibbon's use of the qualities of 'epic' format where the focus is on heroic progression. The novel(s) focus upon a period in time covering roughly the forty year life-span of the heroine and accentuate the values, tenets, beliefs and dogmas of the central characters. Jameson indicates that the complete use of such an 'epic' format is only possible when daily life is still felt to be meaningful and immediately comprehensible, since epic narration is at one with its subject matter.⁹²¹

The heroine of Grassic Gibbon's novels is Chris, a woman born in 1893,⁹²² it traces her life and her loves up until about 1933, a forty year span which covers the same period as the novels by Brierley, Hanley, Holdsworth, Jones, Lewis, Macgill, McArthur & Kingsley, Tressell and Wilkinson already referred to. Chris Guthrie⁹²³ is growing up in a farming family in the fictional estate of Kinraddie in the Mearns to the north east of Scotland. Life is hard in the winter of 1911, and Chris's family is dysfunctional, her mother for example poisons her baby twins then commits suicide:

[...] it all came out at the inquest, mother had poisoned herself and the twins, because she was pregnant again [...] she had killed herself while of unsound mind.⁹²⁴

Chris's father, John Guthrie, is portrayed negatively throughout much of the novel, at times he is even cruel as when he beats his seventeen year old son and the reader is informed

⁹²⁰ M. P. McCulloch and S. M. Dunnigan, *A Flame in the Mearns Lewis Grassic Gibbon A Centenary Celebration* (Scotland: University of Glasgow, 2003), p.16

⁹²¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell UP, 1981), p.160

⁹²² Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.208

⁹²³ 'Guthrie' is the family name; Chris later marries twice and her name changes accordingly.

⁹²⁴ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.71

that '[Guthrie] leathered him till the weals stood blue across his haunches; and that night Will could hardly sleep for the pain of it.'⁹²⁵ There are also moments when Chris fears she will be raped by her father as he frequently tries to seduce her into an incestuous relationship following the suicide of his wife:

John Guthrie got out of bed [...] a beast that sniffed and planned and smelled at the night. And once he came soft down the cowering creak of the stairs and stopped by her [Chris's] door, and she held her breath, near sick with fright, though what was there to be feared of? And she heard his breath come quick and gasping, and the scuffle of his hand on the sneck of the door; and then that stopped.⁹²⁶

And following John's stroke Chris recalls times when

father lay with red on his face and his eye on her, whispering and whispering at her, the harvest in his blood, whispering her to come to him, they'd done it in Old Testament times, whispering *You're my flesh and blood, I can do with you what I will, come to me Chris.*⁹²⁷ (author's italics)

All three novels touch on current historical 'political' issues, including the nature of the Scot's Identity and what was sometimes referred to as the 'peasant crisis'⁹²⁸ which encompasses the coming of modernisation to traditional farming-communities. This theme is explored symbolically and there is also the gradual intrusive appearance of modern machines representing the 'progress' which brushed the people from the land:

[...] he'd come to do farming in a scientific way [...] but God! By now you could hardly get into the place for the clutter of machines that lay in the yard.⁹²⁹

⁹²⁵ *ibid*; p.51

⁹²⁶ *ibid*; p.78

⁹²⁷ *ibid*; p.112

⁹²⁸ David Craig, 'Novels of Peasant Crisis' in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2, (1973), p.51

⁹²⁹ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.157

However, these same machines are seen by socialist Chae Strachan as not 'clutter' but a way of easing the burdens of *us*:

Chae wouldn't have that, he swore *Damn't, no, the machine's the best friend of man, or it would be in a socialist state. It's coming and the chaving'll (struggling) end, you'll see, the machine'll do all the dirty work.*⁹³⁰ (author's italics)

And there is the destruction of the woods around Kinraddie to aid the war-effort, again forcing the old to give way to the new:

[...] over by the Mains he'd [Chae] come upon the woodmen, teams and teams of them hard at work on the long bit forest that ran up the high brae, sparing nothing there but the yews [...] up above Upperhill they had cut down the larch, and the wood was down that lay back of old Pooty's. [...] the trustees had sold it well, they got awful high prices [...] it was wanted for aeroplanes and such things.⁹³¹

Later Chris refers to the consequences of such destruction:

[...] she minded what Chae had said would happen when the woods came down; once the place [Chae's marital home] had been sheltered and lithe, it poised now up on the brae in whatever storm might come. The woodmen had left a country that looked as though it had been shelled by a German army.⁹³²

Let us examine how such observations reflect or oppose patterns and opinions set out in the novels of the Welsh writer Lewis Jones, the English writer Robert Tressell and the Irish writer James Plunkett as regards their portrayal and/or identification of *them* and *us*.

The first thing to note is that Grassic Gibbon's novels centre around Chris, a woman who in some small ways echoes Sian in Jones' novels although Chris is altogether more expansive,

⁹³⁰ *ibid*; p.157

⁹³¹ *ibid*; p.201

⁹³² *ibid*; p.212

more rounded in character. Chris holds things together while asserting her independence, she is a part of the Mearns, indeed part of agricultural Scotland and some commentators even see her as Caledonia.⁹³³ Chris presents therefore, to some eyes, an allegorical figure for Scotland itself. As a woman however she seeks her own destiny, recognises and follows her own sexual instincts and 'endures' much like the land itself. Anderson notes that 'the struggles of women are made a central concern'⁹³⁴ and it would not seem an exaggeration to describe Chris as 'feminist' or even to read the *Scots Quair* trilogy as a feminist work. To do that though the reader would need to approach the 'feminist' aspects more in relation to *écriture féminine*⁹³⁵ concentrating less on the woman's place and more on the difference which relates to femininity and otherness. That Chris is 'other' is indisputable and she, along with the majority of women portrayed, holds true to 'human values' although she appears to go with the flow of history, yet the reader notes that she acts to shape her life where she can, choosing what is life-giving as opposed to what is imprisoning.⁹³⁶

Through Chris and through the author-as-commentator are revealed various aspects of religion as when John Guthrie references the Old Testament to justify his lust for his daughter. Other commentary in the novel which shall be examined later suggests a 'political' side to religion. And even at the very beginning of the novel when the author is outlining the 'history' of the land we read about the Auld Kirk in particular in such terms:

[...] the poison of the French Revolution came over the seas [...] the Auld Kirk preached submission from the pulpits.⁹³⁷

⁹³³ Douglas Dunn, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Literature' in *Scotlands*, 2, (1994) pp.1-23 & pp.16-17

⁹³⁴ Carol E. Anderson, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Character and Symbol' in PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1985), Edinburgh Research Archive: <https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/7354> (accessed November 6th 2015) p.290

⁹³⁵ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' translated by Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen in *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 Summer, (1976), pp.875-893.

⁹³⁶ Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Modernism and Marxism in *A Scots Quair*' in M. P. McCulloch and S. M. Dunnigan, *A Flame in the Mearns Lewis Grassie Gibbon A Centenary Celebration* (University of Glasgow, 2003), p.39

⁹³⁷ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.13

Initially we see that the author can be quite flippant with regard to ministers and their wives and, by implication, the Church itself:

[...] ministers' wives were aye folk to complain and don't know when they're well off, them and the silver they get for their bit creatures of men preaching once or twice on Sunday.⁹³⁸

Note that the ministers are referred to as 'creatures', a word used throughout the trilogy to describe them. But this is tongue-in-cheek stuff similar to such throwaway comments as, when referring again to ministers, the reader is informed that

[...] they came time about in the Sunday forenoons and took their service there at Kinraddie; and God knows for all they had to say they might well have bidden at home.⁹³⁹

This dismissive attitude continues with:

[...] the ministers all over the Howe were offering up prayers for rain between the bit about the Army and the Prince of Wales' rheumatics.⁹⁴⁰

The latter comment, made by the author-as-commentator, links the ministers with *them* in the shape of the Army and Royalty but also conjures an image of shamans performing a rain-dance. At one and the same time the observation is informative and scathingly mocking.

Later however the commentary becomes more barbed:

[...] if there's a body on earth that would skin a tink for his sark and preach for a

⁹³⁸ *ibid*; p.18

⁹³⁹ *ibid*

⁹⁴⁰ *ibid*; p.36

pension in purgatory it's an Auld Kirk minister.⁹⁴¹

It is of interest to note here something we shall return to later, the relationship between the central characters and the land which endures. Indeed Graeme Whittington comments that in this particular passage

[...] the same relationship as existed between man and the land also appears in the community's scepticism of the church's ministers.⁹⁴²

Whittington sees the 'scepticism' stemming mainly from the 'community' whereas I would suggest that there is evidence that it stems more frequently from the author-as-narrator although at times it is extremely difficult to identify 'a' narrator amidst the diverse voices.

Later still though the Reverend Gibbon is revealed as an 'adulterer'⁹⁴³ and a drunken lecherous individual:

[...] the whole lot of them went to a public house and had their dram and syne another on top [...] syne two or three more to keep the wind out [...] Some said that midway the carouse Mr. Gibbon had got up to make a bit prayer; and one of the barmaids had laughed at him and he chased her out of the bar up to her room and finished his prayer with her there.⁹⁴⁴

But then in keeping with his initial light-hearted approach to the clergy the commentator adds immediately; 'But you couldn't believe every lie you heard.'⁹⁴⁵ We should note too that again it is the commentator speaking and further that he is vaguely attributing happenings or observations to a third party or parties with his 'Some said' aside. During Chris's wedding to

⁹⁴¹ *ibid*; p.61

⁹⁴² Graeme Whittington, 'The regionalism of Lewis Grassie Gibbon' in *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 90:2, (1974), pp.75-84 & p.76

⁹⁴³ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.81

⁹⁴⁴ *ibid*; p.89

⁹⁴⁵ *ibid*

Ewan however Chae and she are in the barn when a sack draught-shield blows down to reveal:

[...] the minister and the maid [...] she'd her arms round him and the big curly bull [Reverend Gibbon] was kissing the quean like a dog lapping at his porridge.⁹⁴⁶

During the run-up to the Great War and throughout the war itself the Reverend Gibbon, unsurprisingly, is fully supportive but he is somewhat simplistic in his analysis; 'he said God was sending the Germans for a curse and a plague on the world because of its sins.'⁹⁴⁷ and further; 'he told how the German beasts now boiled the corpses of their own dead men and fed the leavings to pigs [...] he said that GUD would surely smite them.'⁹⁴⁸ This mocking of the clergy continues with reference to the son of Reverend Gibbon, Stuart, who went off to the war but was not killed:

[...] the great, curled steer had more sense in him than that. [...] fell in with some American creatures that controlled a kirk in New York. And they asked him if he'd like to have that kirk, all the well-off Scots went to it; and he took the offer like a shot.⁹⁴⁹

The comment that 'all the well-off Scots went to it; and he took the offer like a shot' is implying of course that he was more inclined to feather-his-own-nest than to minister God's word.

It is not merely the Church however which is dismissed with indifference or with mocking contempt. Political parties and ideologies, at least those of the mainstream, are equally scorned and nationalism is not seen as worthy of much debate either.

⁹⁴⁶ *ibid*; p.161

⁹⁴⁷ *ibid*; p.192

⁹⁴⁸ *ibid*; p.215

⁹⁴⁹ *ibid*; p.249

Although I drew attention to the trilogy as being essentially 'feminist', even Chris is a somewhat stereotypical 'female' being concerned as much with what she does *not* do as that which she *does*, which is to say that her actions are perhaps defensive as opposed to active. She is portrayed also, rather too frequently for comfort, as a somewhat sexual object and Isobel Murray comments upon the number of times Chris is described nude:

[...] the sexual desirability of the female Chris is regularly seized upon by her creator and this happens no less than five times in *Sunset Song*, six times in *Cloud Howe* and eight times in *Grey Granite*.

adding

There is an element of titillation here that seems deliberate.⁹⁵⁰

The conclusion of the trilogy also leaves something of the notion of a feminist heroine behind being as it is ambiguous; it *could* read as a defeat for Chris as she fades alone into an obscure martyrdom. However; with all of these reservations in mind the author centres on that which is, as he sees it, central to women and to Chris especially. Being central it has to identify with that which is personal which brings the reader around to Carol Hanisch's 'the personal is political'⁹⁵¹ and the nineteen sixties feminist-debate which maintained that an accurate presentation of the problem was as important as taking action. Raising an awareness was in fact itself a form of political-action which in turn led to debate and recognition of relationships, women's roles in marriage, and their feelings about childbearing, contraception and the workplace. To that extent Chris is always stepping back to view, as it were, the bigger picture and it could be argued that this is what she is doing as the novel(s) draw to a conclusion.

⁹⁵⁰ Isobel Murray, 'Gibbon's Chris: a Celebration with some Reservations' in M. P. McCulloch and S. M. Dunnigan, *A Flame in the Mearns Lewis Grassie Gibbon A Centenary Celebration* (University of Glasgow, 2003), p.59

⁹⁵¹ Carol Hanisch, 'The Personal is Political' <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> (author's website: accessed: April 6th 2015)

With the Gibbon family safely departed since they 'had gone clean out of Kinraddie, there'd be far more room and far less smell',⁹⁵² the new minister, Colquhoun, arrives to make himself 'fair objectionable before he'd been there a month.'⁹⁵³ Why was he objectionable? And to whom was he objectionable? He was objectionable to everyone, workers and the establishment alike, because he

chummed up with ploughmen, he drove his own coal, he never wore a collar that fastened at the back [...] and he stormed at farmers for the pay they paid and he helped the ploughmen's Union.⁹⁵⁴

He was also associated with the Bolsheviks, Lenin and Trotsky with even some hints that he was a socialist who believed in free-love.⁹⁵⁵ Worse still there were 'scandalous stories that he'd taken up with young Chris Tavendale'.⁹⁵⁶ The first novel, *Sunset Song*, ends appropriately with the sun setting on the betrothal of the Reverend Colquhoun and Chris with a memorial service for those lost in the great war and the new 'socialist' minister delivering a sermon, not without some ironic humour for modern readers, entitled; 'For I will Give You the Morning Star'.^{957 958}

It should however be noted before proceeding that the central characters express their own individual beliefs relating to religion throughout the trilogy. Beliefs which are apparently not only at odds with those of the narrator but which are sometimes unexpected. Long Rob for

⁹⁵² Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.249

⁹⁵³ *ibid*; p.250

⁹⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁹⁵⁵ *ibid*; p.251

⁹⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁹⁵⁷ *ibid*; p.254

⁹⁵⁸ The newspaper *The Morning Star* (until recently the official organ of the CPGB) of course did not surface under that name until the 1960's, its predecessor however was in existence at the time that Gibbon was writing but was known then as *The Daily Worker*. However, I feel sure the author would applaud the historical irony of a man who was to be accused by the hierarchy continually of being a 'socialist' delivering a sermon on *The Morning Star*.

example is a rebel and a socialist and prone to 'make a fool of God'⁹⁵⁹ but although his friend Chae is himself an ardent socialist he rejects Rob's scepticism thus:

*Something there is up there, Rob man, there's no denying that. If I thought there wasn't I'd out and cut my throat this minute.*⁹⁶⁰ (author's italics)

The old 'trawl-skipper' is described as being

awful religious and fond of a nip, who thrashed his old wife near every night, singing out hymn tunes like hell the while.⁹⁶¹

Chris herself opines on religion:

it only a fairy-tale, not a good one, dark and evil rather, hurting life, hurting death, no concern of hers.⁹⁶²

Chris also sees the minister Gibbon as 'a fusionless fool'.⁹⁶³

Perhaps the single most scornful and yet rationally stated comment on religion is voiced by the author/commentator with regard to the death of Ma Cleghorn whom the author envisages visiting Heaven after her death:

Let's have a look at this Heaven of yours. And she pushed him [St. Peter] aside and took a keek in, and there was God with a plague in one hand and a war and a thunderbolt in the other and the Christ in glory with the angels bowing, and a scraping and banging of harps and drums, ministers thick as a swarm of bluebottles, no sight of Jim and no sight of Jesus [...] and she wasn't impressed. And she said to

⁹⁵⁹ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.103

⁹⁶⁰ *ibid*; pp.103-4

⁹⁶¹ *ibid*; p.501

⁹⁶² *ibid*; p.508

⁹⁶³ *ibid*; p.152

St. Peter *This is no place for me*, and turned and went striding into the mists and across the fire-tipped clouds to her home.⁹⁶⁴ (author's italics)

These words echo a mocking contempt which consistently pervades the trilogy; 'harps and drums' are not melodious but 'scraping and banging', the ministers buzz around like 'bluebottles', and God is concerned only with wars, disease and storms. The understated comment by Ma Cleghorn that 'she wasn't impressed' by Heaven precedes her defiance voiced to St. Peter. Whatever the reader's views on religion, as a comment on the notion of Heaven, portrayed from the pulpit as being an ultimately divine and desirable place in which to spend eternity, the author's viewpoint is a powerfully stated case for the opposition. Of course the comic interjection to tell the reader of the Ma Cleghorn anecdote is typical of a certain levity which pervades throughout the novels in relation to otherwise 'serious' topics such as the Church or Politics. As Borthwick puts it; 'political agitation provides a communal voice as well as a carnival atmosphere generating a feeling of both escapism and hope.'⁹⁶⁵

The general tone then, or at least that stemming from our often sceptical narrator, is that religion is not even important enough to be categorised into a *them* or an *us* camp; it is simply observed with an element of contempt.

We meet briefly with the obnoxious and hypocritical MacDougall Brown, a lay-preacher who is 'Salvation Army as near as dammit'⁹⁶⁶ and who, with his wife, runs the post office and store and together they stay up at night 'sanding the sugar and watering the paraffin' but in keeping with the author's wry sense of humour he adds, 'or so folk said, but they tell such lies.'⁹⁶⁷ These appear to be throw-away comments however there is a serious side to them in

⁹⁶⁴ *ibid*; p.586

⁹⁶⁵ David Borthwick, 'From *Grey Granite* to Urban Grit: A Revolution in Perspectives' in M. P. McCulloch and S. M. Dunnigan (Eds.), *A Flame in the Mearns Lewis Grassie Gibbon A Centenary Celebration* (University of Glasgow, 2003), p.68

⁹⁶⁶ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.312

⁹⁶⁷ *ibid*; p.313

that they invite the reader to examine what is said and by whom it is being said and to re-read the words spoken afresh. If the comment referred to for example had simply ended with the image of the Browns engaged in a fraudulent act then there might have been some authority to accompany the comment; after all, the reader has been informed of something by the narrator. However; by adding 'or so folk said, but they tell such lies.' the narrator/author alienates the reader from his initial acceptance initiating, possibly, a rethink.

However, the new minister, Robert Colquhoun, married now to Chris, continues to be described as a more humane man-of-God than the previous minister. Robert seldom mentions God as he ministers charity and kind words because he realises that 'a man blushed if you mentioned God'.⁹⁶⁸ He is plagued however with bouts of depression which are linked to a gassing he suffered during the war which has also left some element of what we would now recognise as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, as a legacy.

In the main Robert Colquhoun acts and behaves like a socialist, or at least like one of *us*, and there is an interesting comparison made by Chris with regard to Chae's socialism and Robert's religion linking socialist sacrifice with the death of Christ on the cross:

Chae Strachan far in your younger days, who had said that the mission of the common folk was to die and give life with their deaths forever – Like Robert's God in a way.⁹⁶⁹

However, although Robert *acts* like a socialist he knows that the differences between his beliefs and those of such men as Chae are as great as their united aims, for socialism to him is in some respects the opposite of Christianity and referring to the 'socialists'; the 'spinners' who disturb his street-meeting, he observes, '*those spinner chaps – a perfect devil if they're*

⁹⁶⁸ *ibid*; p.281

⁹⁶⁹ *ibid*; p.361

*right [...] a war of the classes to bring fruit to the War.*⁹⁷⁰ (author's italics) It is tempting to debate herein what it is that drives both Chae and Robert, as the two beliefs, Socialism and Christianity, are often viewed, from Robert's perspective anyway, as having some similarities. However; for now it is important to log 'attitudes' towards religion as expressed by the characters and the author/commentator and to pass comment or record such similarities only when they specifically occur.

That said however it is worth examining in some detail an incident, and the commentary which accompanies it, which occurs when Robert bursts in on Meiklebogs, in his own (Robert's) kitchen, having a sexual encounter with the maid Else:

The minister had said *This won't do, Else*, fair mad with rage at old Meiklebogs, for he himself had slept with his maid, and was over-mean to share the lass out.⁹⁷¹
(author's italics)

As always the commentator qualifies and blurs the evidence by adding that 'Some said it was a damn lie'⁹⁷² and later the commentator adds what might be gossip, what might be his own reminiscing:

If he [Robert] wasn't the kind to go to bed with any bit quean could you tell a man why he was chief with the Cronin dirt, socialists that said you might lie where you liked and didn't believe in morals or marriage?⁹⁷³

The 'Cronin dirt' refers to Jock Cronin, a Labour Party member and leader of the spinners, later to become a Union official. And the idea that socialists do not believe in 'morals or marriage' stems indirectly from the Communist Manifesto whose declared intent, the abolition of the family, was seen at the time as a license for 'free love':

⁹⁷⁰ *ibid*; p.361

⁹⁷¹ *ibid*; p.383

⁹⁷² *ibid*; p.383

⁹⁷³ *ibid*; p.384

Abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists [...] In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie [...] The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes.⁹⁷⁴

It could be read that the commentator in *A Scots Quair* is asking why the minister is behaving just like a socialist, like the 'Cronin dirt'. Is this narrator/commentator suggesting, with a touch of ironic humour perhaps, that 'by their deeds ye shall know them'?⁹⁷⁵

It is interesting also that Robert, like most socialists at the time, but unlike the established churches, advocates a Darwinian perspective; 'damn't! he had said we were monkeys, not men'⁹⁷⁶ and that further, Ake Ogilvie (among others), is convinced he is not '*a good Conservative*' but instead '*a Labour tink*'.⁹⁷⁷ (author's italics) Robert also clearly supports the General Strike when he says to his wife Chris, '*we'll alter these things forever in May*'.⁹⁷⁸ (author's italics) The mill-owner's son, Stephen Mowat, asks Robert to join the Organisation for Maintenance Supplies, the individuals who would drive the trams, man the ports and generally try to break the power of the General Strike. Robert answers him thus:

*'I can't help the OMS myself – you see I've another plan afoot... do all that I can to hinder the OMS or such skunks as try to interfere with the strike.'*⁹⁷⁹ (author's italics)

'skunks' is a powerful and emotive word; clearly Robert is a minister who speaks his mind and in this instance he is clearly sympathetic to *us* as opposed to *them*.

⁹⁷⁴ K. Marx and F. Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto' (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) Section '2'

⁹⁷⁵ King James Bible; *Mathew 7:20*

⁹⁷⁶ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.395

⁹⁷⁷ *ibid*; p.395

⁹⁷⁸ *ibid*; p.401

⁹⁷⁹ *ibid*; p.410

In general however religion and the Church are in decline:

[...] every Kirk in the Howe grew toom, a minister would sometimes rise of a Sunday and preach to a congregation of ten, in a bigging builded to hold two hundred.⁹⁸⁰

As time progresses Robert declines into insanity seeing a vision of Christ with his stigmata as he (Robert) rode on his bike through Dunnottar's woods,⁹⁸¹ a vision Chris refers to as 'the filth of the thing'⁹⁸² (author's italics) believing it to be a symptom of the depression brought on by Robert's war experiences. Like Father Giffley in *Strumpet City*, Robert lapses in and out of his insanity as when he suddenly stops in the midst of a sermon and sees Christ walking in the aisle.⁹⁸³ Even here though, in a time of great tragedy when we witness a man driven insane by the horrors of war and the failure of his beliefs, the author finds time to mock at religion causing Chris to muse; 'why wasn't Robert like other ministers? [...] with no religious nonsense about them'.⁹⁸⁴ And, somewhat poignantly, the image of Christ returns to Robert as his lungs, weakened by the gas attack he suffered in the war, finally give out and he drowns in his own blood which soaks the pages of the Bible as he falls while delivering a sermon referring to the General Strike and 'the leaders of the great nine days'.⁹⁸⁵ He refers to a peculiar incident reminiscent of the death of 'Rashers' Tierney⁹⁸⁶ in *Strumpet City* about rats coming to feed on the flesh of a hungry child; 'eating its flesh in a sacrament of hunger'.⁹⁸⁷ With this image presented the second book of the trilogy ends, and our heroine Chris, the Minister's widow, endures, walking away from her second husband with her son Ewan at her side.

⁹⁸⁰ *ibid*; p.426

⁹⁸¹ *ibid*; p.428

⁹⁸² *ibid*; p.433

⁹⁸³ *ibid*; p.440

⁹⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁹⁸⁵ *ibid*; p.469

⁹⁸⁶ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.556

⁹⁸⁷ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.470

In book three, *Grey Granite*, the reader is introduced to Reverend Edward MacShilluck and we revert to what is more like the stereotypical hypocrite minister of *Sunset Song*. He is first seen condemning the unemployed in their battles with the police as 'disgraceful' and 'a portent of the atheist, loose-living times.' And the same bottom-slapping letch queries why the police had not called out the army to quell the workers.⁹⁸⁸ This minister of God voices his opinion that what the people of Ducairn need were 'folk like the Fascists, they knew how to keep tink brutes in trim.'⁹⁸⁹ When there is a horrific explosion at Gowans and Gloags factory killing many and wounding others the Reverend MacShilluck preaches from the pulpit that the catastrophe was 'the Hand of Gawd, mysteriously at work'⁹⁹⁰ while ordinary workers suggest that the explosion was 'culpable negligence [...] deliberately planned to see the effect of poisoned-gas on a crowd.'⁹⁹¹ The last words from the clergy as the trilogy ends sees MacShilluck speaking again from the pulpit denouncing workers' unrest and hunger-march thus; 'we could see the mind of Moscow again, deluding our unemployed brothers'⁹⁹² and this man of God advocates 'a stern stand and put down these activities of the anti-Christ.'⁹⁹³

So apparently the clergy in the main are not to be trusted in Grassic Gibbon's novels, with few exceptions they belong in the *them* camp. However, they are not angrily judged by the author as in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. There is no sense either that Grassic Gibbon is presenting in his series of preachers a unified balance of character which may represent the Church as in *Strumpet City*. It is difficult though to know for sure exactly what the author *is* saying, as Grassic Gibbon's narrator is inclined to cloud many of his comments and apparent interventions with provisos such as 'so they say' or 'it was said by people', giving an impression that not only is the view expressed not necessarily his own but it may not even be true; the choice as to whether or not to believe the narrator is handed over to

⁹⁸⁸ *ibid*; p.536

⁹⁸⁹ *ibid*; p.596

⁹⁹⁰ *ibid*; p.656

⁹⁹¹ *ibid*; p.657

⁹⁹² *ibid*; p.665

⁹⁹³ *ibid*; p.666

the reader.

However, the clergy and religion in *A Scots Quair* do not fare all that much better than in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*. In the main they are self-seekers, hypocrites, they are not part of *us*, they tend to serve *them*. Mostly they support the establishment and the System; they advocate 'control'. That said the Reverend Robert Colquhoun is given the benefit of the doubt. His heart at least is in the right place. He alone seems to be somewhat of an amalgamation of Father Giffley and Father O'Sullivan in *Strumpet City*, struggling to do what is best but failing to be accepted by the workers, indeed perhaps hindered in his efforts by the very religious beliefs which drive him.

The role of the police in *A Scots Quair* comes to the fore later in the trilogy. The author is dealing with crofters and villagers in the earlier two novels, not with City folk (as is the case throughout *Strumpet City* or in strong and reasonably large communities as those portrayed in *Cwmardy* and *We Live*.) Nonetheless the police are identified and presented by Gibbon with his *general* observations via his narrator but they are also specifically identified and examined in the shape of a single individual, Sim Leslie, nicknamed Sergeant 'Feet' and referred to by the locals as a 'clown'. We do not encounter him until late in *Cloud Howe* but it is clear from the start what kind of man he is:

Feet, the policemen went over to them, *Now then you're causing a disturbance*, he said, he was awful proud of that word, was Feet, that he'd got in a book on how bobbies should speak. But they took no notice [...] (he was) a patriot-like childe, he hadn't been out to the war himself, they wouldn't let him go with feet like that in case he might block up the trenches.⁹⁹⁴ (author's italics)

So 'Feet' is portrayed as a buffoon, (though as we shall see later, he is a dangerous buffoon unlike the inadequate and foolish police described in Kevin Sampson's novel *Awaydays* who

⁹⁹⁴ *ibid*; p.359

are portrayed as pantomime clowns⁹⁹⁵) individuals to be mocked by the narrator. His oversized feet are suggestive of the 'clown' which the locals identify him as, a vain simpleton who selects the word 'disturbance' from a book and uses it to impress the ordinary people. However, he is not entirely 'clown' and the police in general are always referred to, sometimes obtusely and sometimes directly, as being untrustworthy. The odd short phrase thrown almost casually into the text identifies directly that the police are not to be trusted as in this observation:

Big Jim Trease the Communist, red cheeked and sappy, everybody kenned him and called him *Jim* when bobbies weren't looking.⁹⁹⁶ (author's italics)

He is not, we note, called by any affectionate name when the police *are* looking because of course when the 'bobbies' are looking the workers have to be something 'other,' with a further implication that the 'bobbies' would relay the workers' alleged Communist 'sympathies' to unnamed people in power; to *them*. It is interesting to note Graeme Whittington's observation that

After the war in *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite*, it is the conflict between employer and employee which becomes dominant. The greater introduction of political attitudes destroys the value of the novels for any assessment of group-culture.⁹⁹⁷

It is indeed true that conflict, all aspects of conflict, become dominant in the second and third novels, however what actually happens is that the group-culture is still there and available to be 'assessed' in the attitudes and aspirations of the politics (small case 'p') and also in the Politics (upper case 'P') of the central characters. The group-culture is transmogrified not 'destroyed' as Whittington would have it; the perceptive nature of the novels lies in the fact

⁹⁹⁵ Kevin Sampson, *Awaydays* (London: Vintage, 1998), p.82, pp.145-8 & p.180

⁹⁹⁶ *ibid*; p.502

⁹⁹⁷ Graeme Whittington, 'The regionalism of Lewis Grassie Gibbon' in *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 90:2, (1974), pp.75-84 & p.78

that both *politics* and *Politics* become part of the group-culture.

The other side of Sergeant Feet is revealed when in the third book of the trilogy an unemployment procession is attacked by mounted-police and by foot-police armed with batons. Feet strikes 'a young keelie' with his baton an act which is witnessed by Ewan:

Ewan saw one go by [a mounted police officer], his teeth bared, bad teeth, the face of a beast, he hit out and an old, quiet looking man went down, the hoof of the horse went plunk on his breast.⁹⁹⁸

Later it transpires that the old man had in fact been killed but Duncairn's Chief Constable distributes the 'lie' that 'the old man who had died [...] had been struck down by one of the rioters.'⁹⁹⁹ This riot changes Ewan, he broods on the violence which 'Feet' inflicted on the young boy:

[...] you couldn't forget that scream, tingling, terrified, the lost keelie's scream as that swine Sim Leslie smashed him down.¹⁰⁰⁰

Following this riot Ewan joins the Communist Party and it is when he and his girl-friend Ellen are almost caught, in the dark of night, in the act of swimming nude, by sergeant Feet, that he seizes the opportunity to gain revenge by throwing Feet from the top of the high beach steps. Ellen queries that the 'bobby' might have been badly hurt, a remark which elicits from Ewan the observation:

*'Let him hurt, it will do the swine good, cool and unperturbed, she felt sick a moment. It was only that half-wit Sergeant Sim Leslie'*¹⁰⁰¹ (author's italics)

⁹⁹⁸ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.536

⁹⁹⁹ *ibid*; p.537

¹⁰⁰⁰ *ibid*; p.547

¹⁰⁰¹ *ibid*; p.575

The police then, like the police in *Cwmardy* and *We Live*, like all the police in *Strumpet City* bar one, constitute *them*. It should be noted however, that as the police lie about their role in the death of the old man so too the strikers have no hesitation in deliberately drowning ‘the old foreman Edwards’ during a strike.¹⁰⁰²

When the workers are on strike it almost seems part-and-parcel of the accepted norms that the police will harass them, seeking any excuse to use violence:

[...] pickets had a fair dog’s life, bobbies badgering them backward and forward, keen to have out their sticks and let fly.¹⁰⁰³

However, there is in Grassic Gibbon’s novel a single unnamed bobbie, ‘the young country cuddie’, who is an exception to the rule, he shares jokes with the pickets even when the jokes are on him and the author/commentator observes:

[...] they’d no spite against him, he none against them, funny a chap like that should have joined up with the lousy police though.¹⁰⁰⁴

However, even as they are joking with this police-officer it is made clear that he is an exception:

[...] half-dozen police coming swaggering down to the Gowan’s gates, the meikle (big) sergeant, Feet, in the lead. You cleared your throat and spat on the ground to get the stink of their wind from your thrapple.¹⁰⁰⁵

But the police are not just people to despise or to mock, they are also totally brutal, as when Ewan is arrested on suspicion of the murder of foreman Edwards, he is in a police-cell,

¹⁰⁰² *ibid*; p.597

¹⁰⁰³ *ibid*; p.602

¹⁰⁰⁴ *ibid*; p.607

¹⁰⁰⁵ *ibid*; p.607

already having been severely beaten and he is nursing a suspected broken arm:

[...] three of them came into the cell behind him [...]

Two of them held him while Sim Leslie bashed him, then they knocked him from fist to fist across the cell, body blows in the usual Duncairn way with Reds, one of them slipped in the blood and swore [...] (Ewan) watched with a kind of icy indifference as they did shameful things to his body, threatened even more shameful, twisted that body till his self cowered in behind the ice and fainted again.¹⁰⁰⁶

The scene is brutal, similar to the descriptions of South African Police during the apartheid period interrogating Steve Biko and other alleged ‘terrorists’.¹⁰⁰⁷ The newspapers of course, when they are told about the incident by Trades Unionists and working-people; ‘couldn’t believe this tripe about Ewan being tortured – this was Duncairn not Chicago.’¹⁰⁰⁸ Again Ewan’s perspective is changed by his experience. Hanne Tange astutely observes; ‘In the cell Ewan experiences police brutality and awakens to a new solidarity with the underprivileged, seeing himself as part of a great, proletarian crusade.’¹⁰⁰⁹

We have already touched upon sex and the attitudes to women with regard to Grassic Gibbon’s novels and the incestuous yearnings of Chris’s father. It is important however to record also that Chris recognises her own sexual needs and that the author describes them with empathic commentary. Margaret, the daughter of Chae the socialist, introduces Chris to sexual matters and, when they are quite young, perhaps in their early teens, she shares a lesbian kiss with her. Margaret is talking about ‘lads’ and how their ‘blood pressure alters’ which will cause them to

¹⁰⁰⁶ *ibid*; p.609

¹⁰⁰⁷ Marian Eide, ‘Stephen Biko and the Torture Aesthetic’ in *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 38(1) (2014) <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1854j3hz> (accessed June 11th 2016)

¹⁰⁰⁸ *ibid*; p.612

¹⁰⁰⁹ Hanne Tange, ‘Grassic Gibbon’s Art of Community, A Scots Quair and the Condition of Scotland Studies’ in *Scottish Literature* Vol 33 Issue 1 Article 20, (2004), p.14

'take you like this – wait, there's not a body to see us! – and hold you like this, with his hands held so, and kiss you like this!'

It was over in a moment, quick and shameful, fine for all that.¹⁰¹⁰ (author's italics)

It may have been 'shameful' however the author/narrator's (or Chris's) observation that it was 'fine for all that' emphasises the relevant point. Chris's more mature sexual-awakening comes after a brief encounter with a 'tink' lad whom her father employed casually. The lad seizes her and talks of sex but she has none of it until she is alone in her room that night and

[...] without beginning or reason a strange ache came in her, in her breasts, so that they tingled, and in her throat, and below her heart [...] and she thought of the tink lying there in the barn and how easy it would be to steal down the stairs and across the close [...] to the barn.¹⁰¹¹

But she does not go to keep an assignation instead she

[...] slowly took off her clothes, looking at herself in the long glass that had once stood in mother's room. She was growing up limber and sweet, not bonny, perhaps [...] she thought herself sweet and cool and fit for that lover who would come some day and kiss her and hold her.¹⁰¹²

Her first kiss with a man is with Ewan¹⁰¹³ who will later father her only surviving child. She comes to like him and even 'loved him as they said in the soppy English books.'¹⁰¹⁴ When her first sexual-encounter does occur with Ewan, it is she who calmly ensures that it will not be some hurried 'fumble' but something to remember, something special:

[...] she wasn't afraid, only this could wait for another night's coming, it was sweet

¹⁰¹⁰ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair; Sunset Song, Cloud Howe & Grey Granite* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006), p.55

¹⁰¹¹ *ibid*; p.77

¹⁰¹² *ibid*

¹⁰¹³ *ibid*; p.99

¹⁰¹⁴ *ibid*; p.130

and she wanted it to live and last, not snatch it and fumble it blindly and stupidly. And she caught Ewan's hand and kissed him [...] and she whispered *Wait, Ewan*.¹⁰¹⁵ (author's italics)

This is Chris the teenager; so different, so much more rounded and more confident than either Mary in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* or Mary in *Cwmardy & We Live*.

Throughout her three marriages during the forty years of her life which are presented in the novels, Chris is portrayed as a sexually-independent woman making her own decisions and following her own loves and lusts. When her first husband returns from the war he has become coarse and brutal; on the first night home 'he took her' but never again and when he continues to treat her like a servant the following incident is described:

If you're in need of a breakfast – get it.

He said *You bitch!* And he made to strike her. But she caught up a knife from the table, she had it waiting there nearby, he swore and drew back. She nodded and smiled at that, calm, and put the knife down and went on with her work.¹⁰¹⁶ (author's italics)

With her husband a changed man Chris has no hesitation in seducing Long Rob:

[...] it was her arms that went round his neck, drawing down his head and kissing him.

And although Rob protests that

'we mustn't'

¹⁰¹⁵ *ibid*; p.138

¹⁰¹⁶ *ibid*; p.224

Chris simply whispers

'The haystacks!' and he carried her there [...] she held to him, kissing him, she sought with lips and limbs and blood to die with him then.¹⁰¹⁷ (author's italics)

What the reader observes in this description is a peculiar mixture of tenderness, passion, lust and love. Love because we recall how much she had always liked and respected Rob and lust because it is a one-off act; they are destined never to meet ever again:

[...] she heard him go step-stepping slow with that swinging stride of his down through the darkness, and she never saw him again, was never to see him again.¹⁰¹⁸

There is egalitarianism in the unity of Rob and Chris. They meet as equals and as such each knows what they desire and it is their mutual sexual-desire which unites them; an egalitarian lust that recognises itself for what it is placing the man and the woman on an equal footing.

The rape of Else by Meiklebogs and the attempted rape of Maggie Jean Gordon by Cuddiestoun's 'daft' Andy are treated openly and at some length with the text revealing the horror of the situations. With Meiklebogs the rape of Else is described thus:

[...] he louped on her as a crawly beast louns, something all hair and scales from the wall; or a black old monkey.

She saw once his face in the light of the candle, and that made her near sick.¹⁰¹⁹

And 'daft' Andy is described in very similar terms:

[...] he tore at her frock and cried You come! She nearly fainted [...]

¹⁰¹⁷ *ibid*; p.229

¹⁰¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰¹⁹ *ibid*; p.342

She turned and ran, he went louping after her along the road, like a great monkey he leapt, crying terrible things to her.¹⁰²⁰

Oddly though, perhaps to show some compassion for the 'daft' lad as opposed to the lustful rapist Meiklebogs, Long Rob's singing interrupts 'daft' Andy's lust; 'Music has charms to soothe a savage breast' perhaps.¹⁰²¹

Thus sex and sexuality in *A Scots Quair* are not divided by gender. Women in the home are isolated and the work they undertake is hard involving caring for the home and at times also doing a day's work in the fields. Some may be victims, others lead the way as regards sexuality, something totally unheard of in *Cwmardy & We Live* or in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. For Grassic Gibbon it seems that many of his female characters (Chris Guthrie, Else, Ellen and Ma Cleghorn) express deep concerns relating to gender, as Norquay puts it Grassic Gibbon is 'interested in the ways women might retain elements of control' and suggests this is evidenced by the way they 'retreat into interiority, into apparent masculinity, through sexuality, or even through physical stamina and endurance.'¹⁰²²

For Robert Tressell the *us* is himself as author, lecturer, educator and commentator together with the few individuals in his novel who share his socialist views. The *them* are more diverse, they are not just the capitalists who exploit the workers for profit they are also the organs of Capital; the Church, the 'ignorance', portrayed as 'acceptance', by working-men and women of the System which holds them as wage-slaves, organised religion, the media and most damning of all the majority of the workers themselves who are variously described as 'stupid', 'deluded', 'despicable' and 'hypocrites'.

¹⁰²⁰ *ibid*; p.57

¹⁰²¹ W. Congreve, *The Works of Mr. Congreve: Volume 2. Containing: The Mourning Bride; The Way of the World; The Judgment of Paris; Semele; and Poems on Several Occasions* facsimile reprint of a 1788 edition; (London: Adamant Media, 2001) *The Mourning Bride* Act 1 Scene 1; the opening lines of the play.

¹⁰²² Glenda Norquay 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Women' in Lyall Scott (Ed.), *The International Companion to Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2015), p80

Without doubt Tressell's novel is intended to pass on an idea, a political idea; the idea that capitalism does not work and that we should seriously consider a socialist alternative. In that broad sense *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*¹⁰²³ is a working-class novel which advocates a different System, one which will recognise the value of the working-class. It is also however blatant propaganda; when capitalism is 'defended' it is done so by buffoons with names like Didlum, Sweater, Grinder, Starvem etc. characters who themselves are barely literate. In short in Tressell's novel the narrative is the message and the message is a clearly and unashamedly political one; capitalism does not work, socialism might, so give it a try.

Lewis Jones presents a more clearly defined and even simpler depiction of *them* and *us*. His two novels comprise a straightforward 'history' of the struggles between capital and labour in the Welsh coal-mines at a time when the divisions in society were as clearly writ as *them* who lived in the big house with its acres of gardens and private lake and *us*, who lived in unsanitary, cockroach-infested cottages. The depiction is simpler because no attempt is made to present to the reader any more than a rudimentary description of the System as it was at the time.

Tressell has his central character laboriously describing and explaining to an initially disinterested audience Marx's theories of surplus values which this central character and narrator (Owen) does by means of what he calls 'the money trick'.¹⁰²⁴ These set-scenes are perceived as 'acceptable' (if contrived and artificial in a literary sense) as they are usually presented as music-hall-type interludes with cat-calls from the audience and much ribaldry and humour.¹⁰²⁵

¹⁰²³ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989)

¹⁰²⁴ *ibid*; pp. 225-9

¹⁰²⁵ John Fordham, 'Working-class fiction across the century' in Robert L. Caserio (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth Century English Novel* (Cambridge University Press,

Lewis Jones on the other hand contents himself with describing what Communists *do*. What their role is in everyday life. These people organise educational classes and strive to politicise the miners in a very grass-roots way by talk about tactics to be employed during strikes and by pointing out how the organised union officials will eventually 'sell out'. It is only the Communists who remain loyal to the workers in Jones' novels although as has been noted, even Communism is open to a level of criticism. Thus while Tressell presumes to lecture, even harangue *us*, Jones is content to present leaders whose purpose is to show *us* the way forward as advocated by Marx and Lenin. Perhaps this is why Jones' condemnation of the Church and religion is not as vehement as Tressell's; it is secondary.

I used the word 'history' earlier and yet strictly speaking Jones does not always present the reader with historical accuracy; we have already spoken about his description of troops killing miners during a strike and of the somewhat embellished description of the workers winning a strike outright leaving the bosses 'stricken with fear'. These incidents are patently exaggerations but then Jones professes to be writing works of fiction, fiction however in which the Communist Party seems to have *the* solution and that solution is to follow the elected Communist leaders while being aware of their shortcomings.

Politics aside however there are other clear divisions in Jones' novels between *them* and *us*, the most obvious of which is the police who act as the tools of Capitalism keeping the workers and their families in their allocated places. Almost without exception the police are described in terms which state categorically that they are brutal and vicious, that they are quite prepared to perjure themselves and they act as spies for the establishment; perhaps

they are even child-murderers¹⁰²⁶. As we have noted however Tressell is uninterested in the police, his novel is about a different kind of conflict and perhaps on reflection the difference between Tressell and Jones is that Tressell is saying that we have to change the System but in order to do that we need to educate the working-class. Jones on the other hand, although acknowledging a need for education, is saying that we have to change the System and in order to do that you need to follow your Communist leaders who are committed to revolution and who will educate *us* as to how to achieve a better world.

Two incidents in the novels of Robert Tressell and Lewis Jones which we have not touched upon as yet relate to that middle-group in society; the emerging middle-classes. Almost as asides each of the authors describes the fate of two such characters in very similar terms. In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* Hunter, who is *the* foreman (as opposed to temporary and lower-ranked 'cuddy's'), is lonely and isolated. The author does not condemn him for the job he does, nor for the way he bullies the 'hands', because within the System Hunter has no choice. Nonetheless there is little attempt to empathise with him and in the end he is driven to commit suicide by slashing his throat with a razor.¹⁰²⁷ Similarly in Jones' novels the small shop-keepers are depicted as suffering during strikes or lockouts because of the irregular flow of cash, they are forced to give 'credit' because if they do not then after the strike the workers would take their custom elsewhere. As with Tressell there is little attempt to explore the lives of this middle-group in society and the only small-shopkeeper family whose thoughts a reader is exposed to in Jones' novels are the Cardi family and when times get hard for them they too commit suicide. John Cardi slits his wife Maggie's throat using a cut-throat razor, and then hangs himself.¹⁰²⁸ Both authors acknowledge the existence of this middle-group but how they fit into the struggle is apparently unimportant in the greater scheme of things, they are not firmly on either side thus they are inconsequential,

¹⁰²⁶ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp.571-5

¹⁰²⁷ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.613

¹⁰²⁸ Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We live* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), p.620

in relation to what each novel is attempting to do, they are expendable. The emerging middle-class are neither *them* nor are they *us*.

The emerging-middle, are barely referred to in *Strumpet City* either. Plunkett presents us with a kindly pawnbroker willing to overestimate the value of Pat's boots¹⁰²⁹ but that is about as much reference as a reader acquires relating to this group of people. And yet the novel is expansive and complex, Plunkett himself said:

I wanted to explore what I knew of the city, to get it out of myself and find a shape for my feeling about it [...] Thinking that O'Casey had dealt with the submerged, deprived city and Joyce with the seedy gentility, I thought I would try to get the lot in - the company director types, the priests, the decent working-men, and the utterly outcast.¹⁰³⁰

What is being presented in the main however is the battle between *them* and *us* and it is clear that for Plunkett, as with Lewis and Tressell, those in the middle are of minimal interest or consequence.

The culture of the working-class as portrayed by Plunkett seems to centre around sharing the little they have among themselves; the inhabitants of Chandlers Court are always in the process of 'borrowing' a cup of sugar or a touch of milk and Rashers Tierney, who lives in the basement, is always ready to share any alcohol he has pilfered from the clergy or cigarette-ends he has dug from Theatre bins with his neighbour 'Toucher' Hennessy. When Hennessy is absent he shares his good-luck with his dog Rusty.¹⁰³¹ Hennessy of course, when in work, returns the favour.¹⁰³² A poignant irony lies in the fact that Rashers, crippled from birth, one of the underclass, starving much of the time and living off the contents of

¹⁰²⁹ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.164

¹⁰³⁰ Rosa González, 'Writing out of One's Own Experience: an Interview with James Plunkett' in *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* (Universidad de Barcelona 5,1992)

¹⁰³¹ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.227

¹⁰³² *ibid*; p.195

rubbish-bins finds time to concern himself with the hunger of others:

He found it hard to get about. Sometimes, especially on wet days, his bad leg ached and made him hobble. Sometimes his chest pained abominably and dizziness made the streets spin and spin about him. He began for the first time to be troubled by the hunger of others.¹⁰³³

Although real hardship and hunger follow-on from strikes and lock-outs the working-class in Plunkett's novel soon recover to fight another day; the single exception being Rashers, born a cripple and abandoned by his parents, the man named by Pat as 'The Bard of the Revolution'. Rashers dies a slow and lonely death from starvation alongside his dog Rusty.¹⁰³⁴ He is representative of an underclass and only indirectly is he in conflict with *them* because in the main he has no labour to sell and when he has the opportunity to work his physical frailty makes him unable to barter terms and conditions.

Pat also shares every good fortune he has; two pounds to Fitz, four to Lily Maxwell the prostitute¹⁰³⁵ and extravagantly spending five pounds on a clock to celebrate Mary and Fitz' wedding.¹⁰³⁶ When in-pocket he buys ale for Rashers and when out-of-pocket he finds the same man some work to earn a crust.¹⁰³⁷ Even the elite Mrs. Bradshaw shares her cash and her goods with her ex-servant Mary¹⁰³⁸ and spends money providing a 'fitting' funeral for her ex house-keeper Miss Gilchrist¹⁰³⁹ when she dies in the workhouse. The intricacy of her 'kindness' of course lies in the fact that Mrs. Bradshaw can easily afford to 'share' her cast-offs and some of her wealth to appease her conscience, while the workers apparently share what they have simply because they know what it means to endure hardship and hunger.

¹⁰³³ *ibid*; p.423

¹⁰³⁴ *ibid*; p.552

¹⁰³⁵ *ibid*; p.135

¹⁰³⁶ *ibid*; p.123

¹⁰³⁷ *ibid*; p.423

¹⁰³⁸ *ibid*; p.244

¹⁰³⁹ *ibid*; p.241

Thus even in acts of kindness there is a difference in the way such transactions are perceived when administered by *them* on the one hand and *us* on the other.

Yet when digging more deeply a reader may discover a very real struggle between *them* and *us* in *Strumpet City* and although the divisions are the same as in the other novels discussed the portrayal is more liberal, allowing for a kindly police-man and even Priests who are a diverse group of sometimes likeable individuals. Perhaps it would be fair to say that like the characters who live under Milk Wood; no one is 'wholly bad or good',¹⁰⁴⁰ or if they are then at least a reader can understand why they are as-they-are. Perhaps for Plunkett it is not the System which needs to change, but attitudes.

Nonetheless *Strumpet City* presents a depiction of very real class-struggles. Although the reader is presented with a broad and apparently impartial canvass, the central theme is the struggle between labour and capital. Those who manipulate capital are in the main described in negative terms. Bradshaw for example has extraordinary wealth and power but this is because he is a slum-landlord whose disregard for his tenants leads to their deaths.¹⁰⁴¹ He is not punished for this; instead he and his wife simply 'disappear'. Father O'Connor, close friend of the Bradshaws, although young and to some extent innocent, nevertheless discriminates between 'sheep and goats' when it comes to delivering food parcels to the needy, instructing the strike-breaking Kever not to give parcels to families whose husbands or sons are involved with strikes¹⁰⁴² thus unwittingly causing further strife and of course clearly linking him with *them*. His claim is that as a man of God he serves the poor and needy who comprise *us*, but the reality is that, initially at least, he is literally much more at home with *them* who oppress the poor and needy; the slum-landlord Bradshaw and the playboy Yearling.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Dylan Thomas; 'Under Milk Wood, A Play for Voices' (Aberystwyth: Everyman 1954) the Reverend Eli Jenkins prayer reads: 'We are not wholly bad or good/ Who live our lives under Milk Wood' p.37

¹⁰⁴¹ *ibid*; p.448

¹⁰⁴² *ibid*; p.169

Those depicted as sympathetic to *us* include this same wealthy but wayward Yearling, a man of some intellect and compassion who constantly questions Father O'Connor about morality and Bradshaw about the slums he relies on for his income. Yearling is a genuine philanthropist who sends anonymous sums of money to the family of a worker killed in an accident and who even donates money to the release-fund when Larkin is jailed.¹⁰⁴³ In a scene reminiscent of Barrington's philanthropy in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*¹⁰⁴⁴ Yearling even adopts the role of Father Christmas to furnish the street urchins with an abundance of sweets and cake.¹⁰⁴⁵ But of course Yearling, like Mrs. Bradshaw, can afford to be generous, he is a shareholder in one of these same companies who lock-out the workers and he is a profligate playboy spending his time flirting with barmaids, playing his cello and fishing for trout. His interest in the strike and the workers he comes into contact with is academic. A perceptive reader may observe that his heart is in the right place but essentially he is not one of *us*.

The genuine workers, however, the carters and the stokers who sell their labour, are almost unanimously depicted as generous and warm-hearted. From 'Rashers' Tierney to the foreman Fitz, solidarity is the key concept; with of course the odd exception of the occasional strike-breaking 'scab' such as Kever. The Catholic Church is part of the establishment, it belongs to *them* while pretending to serve *us*, but sometimes individuals who serve the Church, like Father Giffley, turn their sympathies towards the strikers who have been locked out. Unfortunately the 'reward' facing such men is insanity and alcoholism. There is no excuse however for the police who, with a single exception, are portrayed in Plunkett's novel in almost the same terms as Jones portrays them in *Cwmardy* and *We Live*. Plunkett's narrator, describes them as brutal, callous and political, they intimidate the ordinary citizens

¹⁰⁴³ *ibid*; p.445

¹⁰⁴⁴ Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.618

¹⁰⁴⁵ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.322

and even, in a manner reminiscent of Churchill's *Black and Tans* in 1920,¹⁰⁴⁶ enter workers' tenements and deliberately smash the furniture and assault the men on strike.¹⁰⁴⁷

The altogether more expansive trilogy by Grassie Gibbon, whilst being a commentary on *them* and *us* in many ways, is predominantly about the endurance of concrete things, the divisions between English(ness) and Scottish(ness) and the occasional exceptional human being. Whilst in Tressell's novel there is an exasperated contempt for the working-class as expressed by both the author and the central character Owen, in Grassie Gibbon's trilogy the representation of the ordinary workers is much more diverse although at times they are portrayed as a kind of lumpen-proletariat given over to malicious gossip and the relaying of salacious stories. The author/narrator's asides, which have been referred to, present an almost Brechtian alienation technique which would have the reader question almost every opinion presented. Grassie Gibbon's canvas is expansive; his story is more the story of observed humanity than of individual conflict, his hero a woman who is at least as strong and as willful as any man.

With these four authors the divisions between *them* and *us* are shown quite starkly. They write novels of conflict and each has a kernel flavoured with political beliefs. All of the novelists were/are political animals of a left or liberal perspective. Each identifies a kind of war which is continuous, a war which is unfair and unbalanced, a war in which ignorance, lack of education and the presence of the police and the armed forces subjugate decency. An irony most prominent is that 'slaves chosen from slaves'¹⁰⁴⁸ serve the System and crush their own kind; the police are, in the main; brutal, cruel and unfeeling.

¹⁰⁴⁶ R. Bennett, *Black and Tans* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959)

¹⁰⁴⁷ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p.524

¹⁰⁴⁸ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p.24

Chapter ten

End words

Throughout the period of history discussed and reflected upon via literature of the time, lies a constant and often repeated theme which defines or implies a situation of conflict, a situation where the division is *sometimes* as simple as a *them/us* division. The authors discussed in the previous chapter, authors from the four corners of Britain, present the case for *us* and identify *them* in quite a specific manner. Of course there are shades of grey but in general these novels portray a division which though frequently present in many novels is not always identified. That is not so throughout this thesis however.

My presumption, based on past experience where the phrase ‘them and us’ was used frequently and especially by people who would label themselves as ‘working class’, was that the phrase was indicative of a class division; there was *them* who made their money in a manner which was different to *us* who always toiled physically for a wage. And this presumption is broadly correct. However, reading selective novels of the twentieth century which are written by or which have as their focus aspects relating primarily to the working class, it becomes clear that although these class-divisions are central other important differences are either inferred or become apparent with close textual reading and/or research. Divisions which I can now categorise as follows: male/female (especially in the sense of gender-based *attitudes*), secular/non-secular, and further divisions between those who maintain the power hierarchy in society; the police and armed forces and those upon whom the laws and rules are intended to exercise control. As Holdsworth put it, these are the ‘slaves chosen from slaves to keep them in their place’,¹⁰⁴⁹ or in the words of James Plunkett; ‘[police are] the minions of the employers instead of the servants of the citizens’.¹⁰⁵⁰ This is a more concrete division than the vague and debatable issue of class.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, *This Slavery* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), p24

¹⁰⁵⁰ James Plunkett, *Strumpet City* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1982), p150

A word about the books/authors considered, and rejected, especially those writing in the early half of the twentieth century; Harold Hislop of course, a South Shields miner whose *Last Cage Down* specifically explored the class versus class feelings expressed at the time by the CPGB, Rhys Davies, the Welsh son of a grocer and later friend of D. H. Lawrence, and Lawrence himself of course; and there was Jack Hilton a Rochdale plasterer and William Holt the son of a coal heaver. Having myself worked as a plasterer and as a coal-heaver these appealed empathically to me. Walter Greenwood had a great impact upon me being 'on the dole' and newly married when I first read his great novel. George Garrett a stoker (again, a job I once held aboard one of the last tramp steamers to trade through Britain's coastal ports) in the merchant navy and founder of the Unity Theatre in Liverpool where even now I attend regularly. So many writers to consider including Pat Barker's *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down*, Braine's *Room at the Top*, and Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* a phrase from which inspired this thesis. Eventually I decided to reject novels which I had strong knowledge about relating to the trades discussed, and novels with which I over empathised and thus might temper my critical analysis. I did however work for the greater part of my life on building-sites and thus it is valid to ask why I then included *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*. Two reasons: firstly this is arguably the very first truly working-class novel and secondly because at core it is not a novel about the building industry, it is a political thesis which attempts to explain in simple terms many of Marx's theories.

Finally, I see this thesis as a beginning not an end. I have opened new paths which are of strong interest to me and I hope that others may also be inspired. Odd to recognise that a PhD might simply be a first step; but that perhaps is the greatest discovery of all; for me.

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